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THE ECHIDNA
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PENDERS

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BOOK TWENTY

The Forbidden Zone
Part Two of Three

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Born to the most noble of Echidna houses, the latest to continue the family heritage and responsibility as **GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND,** defender of all the forces of evil from the world beyond as well as those who would threaten within, he is none other than... **KNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA!**

An uncommon force of nature has unleashed a **snowstorm** across the face of **The Floating Island,** wrecking havoc for all who dwell upon it. The **fury** that **nature** has created however, pales in significance to the events about to play out, with the participants on a collision course with **destiny**.

Somewhere in the snow-covered **Sandopolis Zone**, we find a downed shuttle containing **two** of the **key players...**

THE PAST.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, LARA?

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

LOOKS PRETTY SERIOUS!

CARE TO DISCUSS IT?

I'VE TRIED TALKING TO YOU, LOCKE--

--BUT YOU DIDN'T LISTEN!

WHAT ABOUT KNUCKLES?

HE'S GOING WITH ME!

YOU THINK I'D LET HIM STAY WITH YOU?

WHAT KIND OF CHILDHOOD IS THAT FOR HIM?

I DON'T WANT YOU TO LEAVE, LARA, BUT I CAN'T FORCE YOU TO STAY!

AS FOR THE BOY--

—YOU KNEW HIS OBLIGATIONS BEFORE WE EVEN UNITED!
WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, HE STAYS!

THE PRESENT.
YOU'RE ALWAYS HAVING TO HAVE YOUR OWN WAY, LOCKE!
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT!

YOU'RE SO WRONG, LARA!

IN FACT--

--I WONDER IF YOU EVER REALLY KNEW ME!

AS LOCKE AND LARA-LE DISCOVER THEY HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT--
--INSIDE ONE OF THE DWELLINGS THAT COMPRISE PART OF THE ROYAL COMPOUND USED BY THE ROYAL HOUSE OF ACORN, COMMANDER GEOFFREY ST. JOHN AND HIS ELITE SQUAD HAVE BEEN MET BY THE ESTATE'S CARETAKERS, MRS. SOMMERSBY, AND HER HUSBAND, A GRUFF BULLDOG KNOWN AS THE COLONEL!

IT IS THE ARRIVAL OF ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL INTO THE ROOM THAT NOW DRAWS EVERYONE'S ATTENTION...
WHO ARE YOU ?
MY NAME IS ELIAS !
I TAKE IT EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT, NANA ?
Once upon A Time In
MOBOTROPOLIS

OH, YES, DEAR!

I WAS JUST SHAKEN A BIT BY THE COMMANDER'S UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL!

ANYONE EVER TELL YOU YOU'RE THE SPITTING IMAGE OF KING ACORN?

YOU KNOW MY FATHER?!! HE'S ALIVE--?!

FATHER?!!

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS NEVER SAID A WORD ABOUT ANY SON!

WE'RE HERE TO LEARN WHAT BECAME OF THE QUEEN--

--AND REPORT BACK, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER!

YOU'VE A LOT OF CONVINCING TO DO FOR ME TO BUY YOUR STORY, MATE!

I'VE SEEN TOO MUCH TO ACCEPT ANYTHING ON FAITH ALONE!

THE LAD IS THE TRUE HEIR TO THE HOUSE OF ACORN, COMMANDER!

OF THAT YOU CAN BE CERTAIN!

BEGGING YOUR PARDON, COLONEL--

--BUT I NEED MORE THAN YOUR WORD OR HIS!

I NEED ABSOLUTE PROOF!

EVEN FACTORING IN ALL THE HARDSHIPS KING ACORN HAS ENDURED OVER THE YEARS--

--I CAN'T ACCEPT THE *PREMISE* OF A FATHER *FORGETTING* HE HAS A *SON* SOMEWHERE!

I DON'T BELIEVE MY FATHER WOULD, EITHER!

YOU ARE MORE LIKELY HIS *INSTRUMENT*--

--SENT HERE TO DIVINE *FACT* FROM *FICTION*--

--NO MATTER WHAT THE *OUTCOME*!

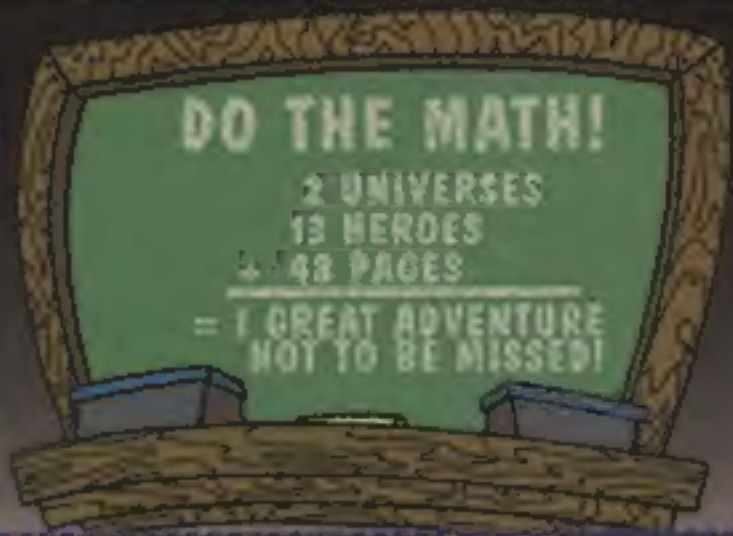
WHICH LEAVES YOU IN A *TOUGH* CORNER, KID!

MAYBE *NOT*, COMMANDER!

SINCE THE WEATHER IS NOT *HOSPITABLE* FOR *TRAVEL* THIS NIGHT--

--LET'S *ALL* GET A GOOD NIGHT'S *REST*, AND COME THE MORNING--

--I'LL TAKE YOU TO *HAVEN*!



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DAY TWO

WELL?

WE'RE ALMOST AT THE SITE WHERE WE LAST *TRIANGULATED* THE *DISTRESS SIGNALS!*

* TO SURVEY AN AREA IN THE SHAPE OF A TRIANGLE - JFG.

WHEN WE ARRIVE, GUARDIAN, YOU'LL *WAIT* HERE UNTIL MY MEN AND I HAVE *SECURED* THE AREA!

I HAVE A *BETTER* IDEA, CONSTABLE--

--YOU AND YOUR TROOPS CAN *STAY* ON BOARD AND *TWIDDLE* YOUR THUMBS FOR ALL I CARE--

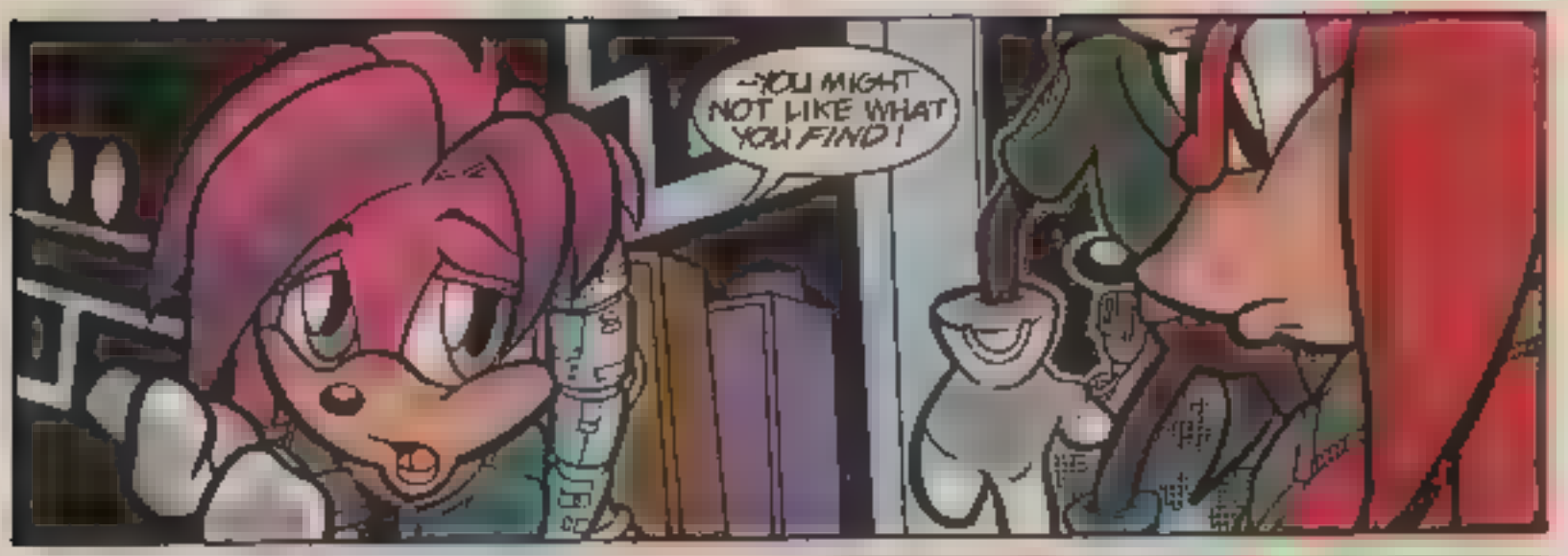
--WHILE I GO ABOARD THAT CRAFT AND *SEE* IF MY *MOTHER* IS *ALIVE* AND *WELL!*

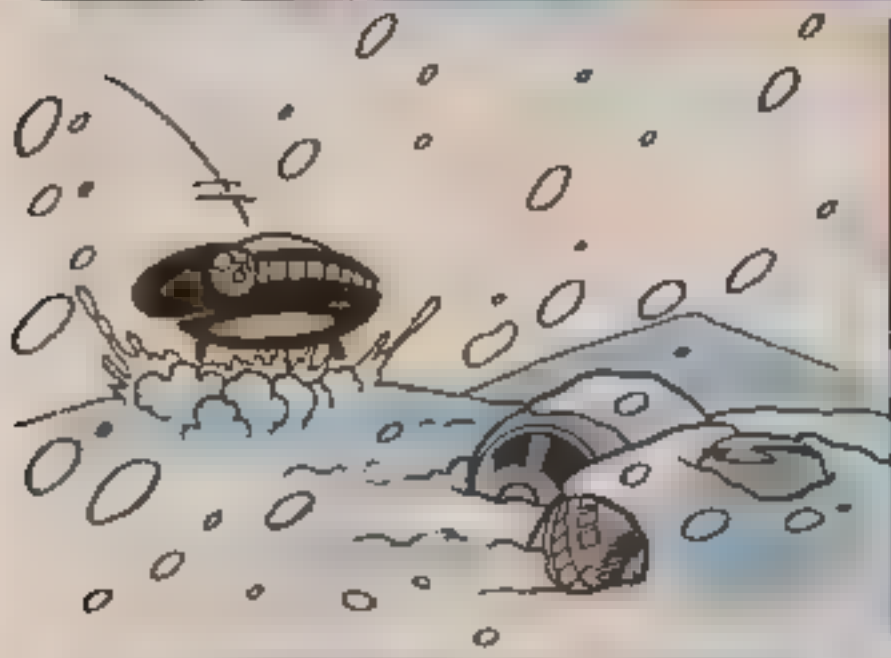
PLEASE, GUARDIAN! BE *REASONABLE!*

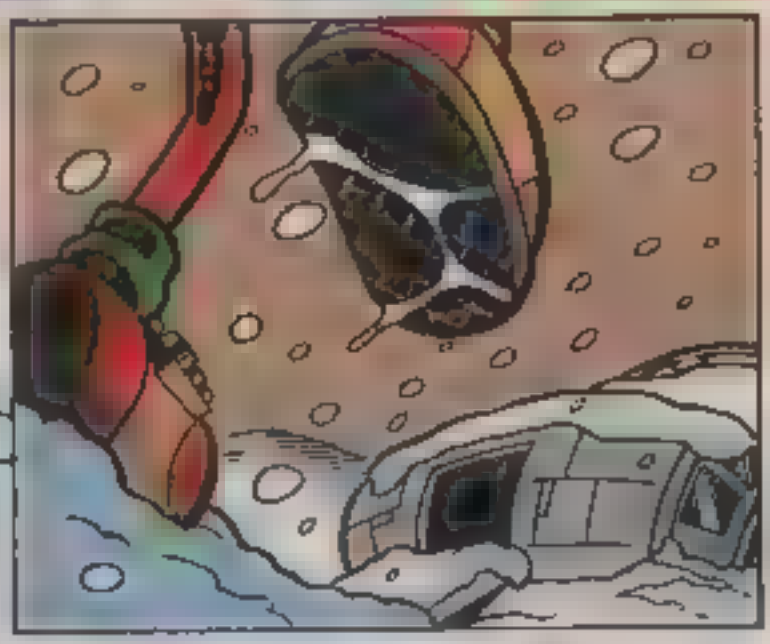
YOU COULD BE WALKING INTO A *TRAP!*

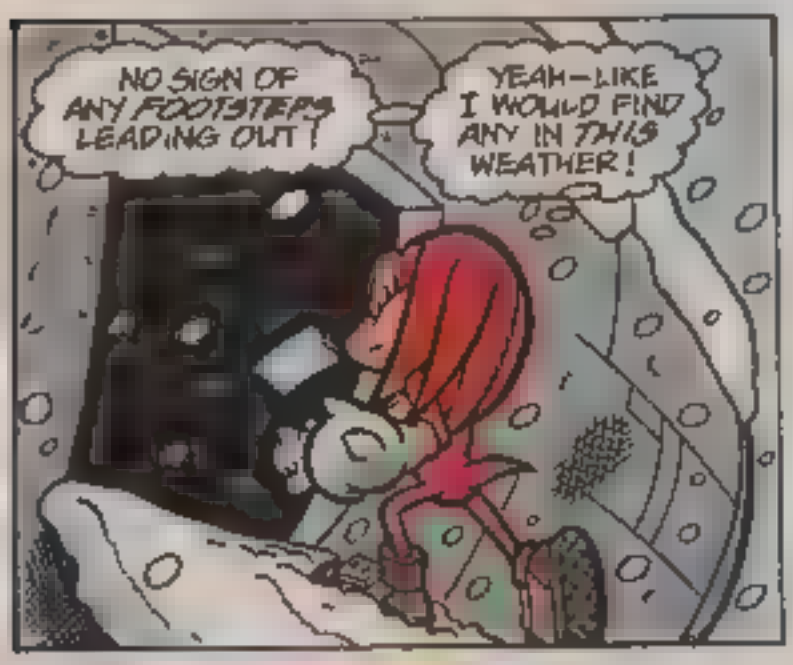
LISTEN TO HIM, KNUCKLES!

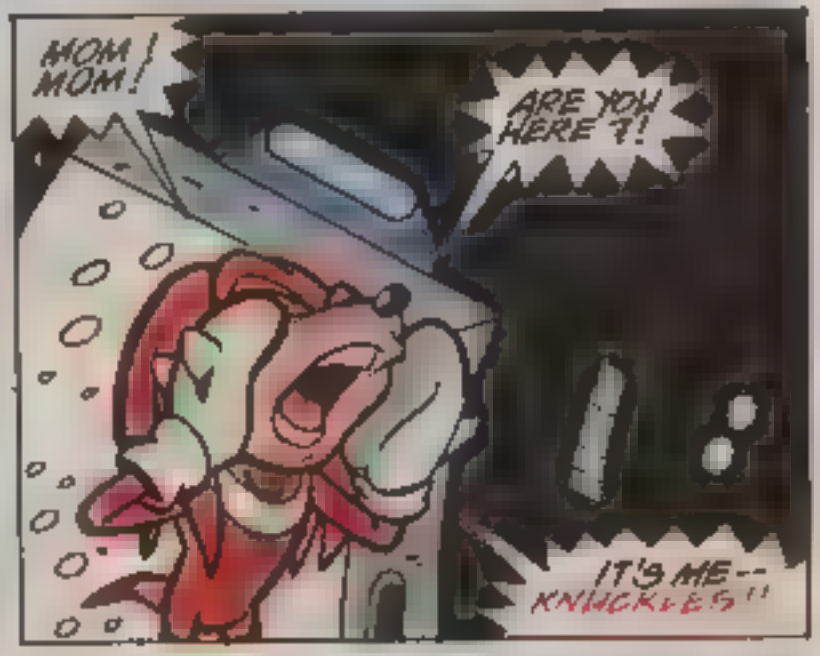
AT THE VERY LEAST--

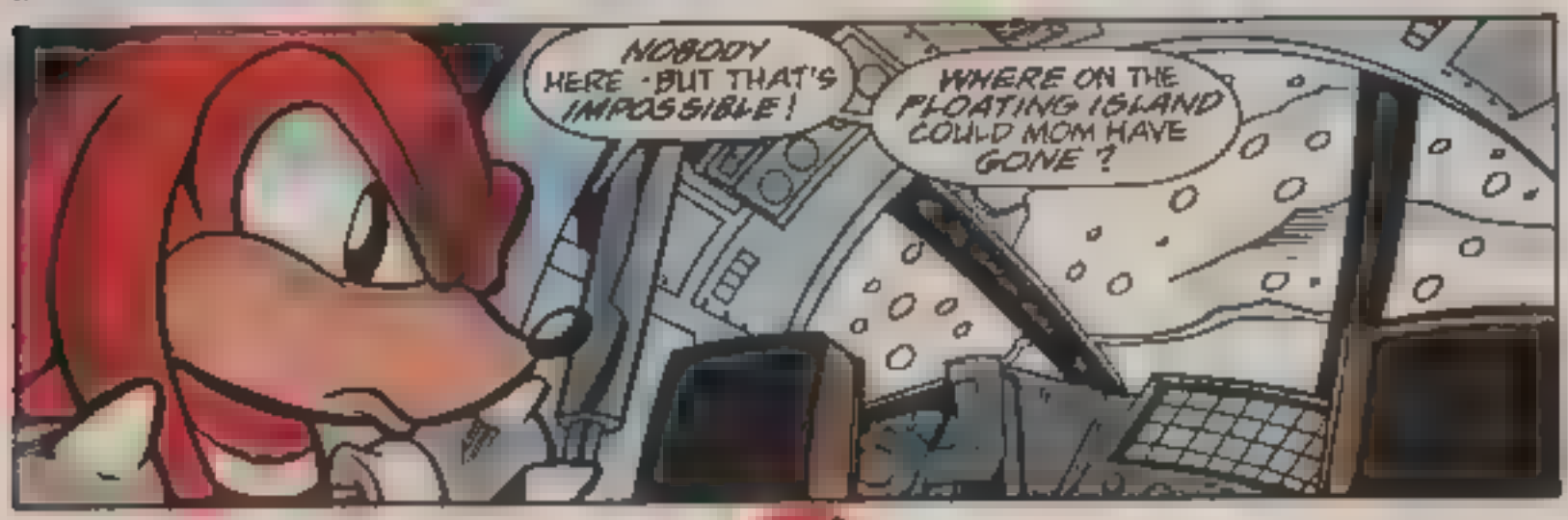

...YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE WHAT YOU FIND!






NO SIGN OF ANY FOOTSTEPS LEADING OUT!
YEAH—LIKE I WOULD FIND ANY IN THIS WEATHER!


MOM! MOM!
ARE YOU HERE?!
IT'S ME-- KNUCKLES!!


NOBODY HERE - BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
WHERE ON THE FLOATING ISLAND COULD MOM HAVE GONE?

"WHERE?"

YOU STILL CAN'T BRING YOURSELF TO CUT ME ANY SLACK, CAN YOU, LARA?

ESPECIALLY NOT YOU, LOCKE!

NOT AFTER THE WAY YOU LEFT!

THE WAY I LEFT?

I'M TAKING THE BOY BACK TO THE FLOATING ISLAND!

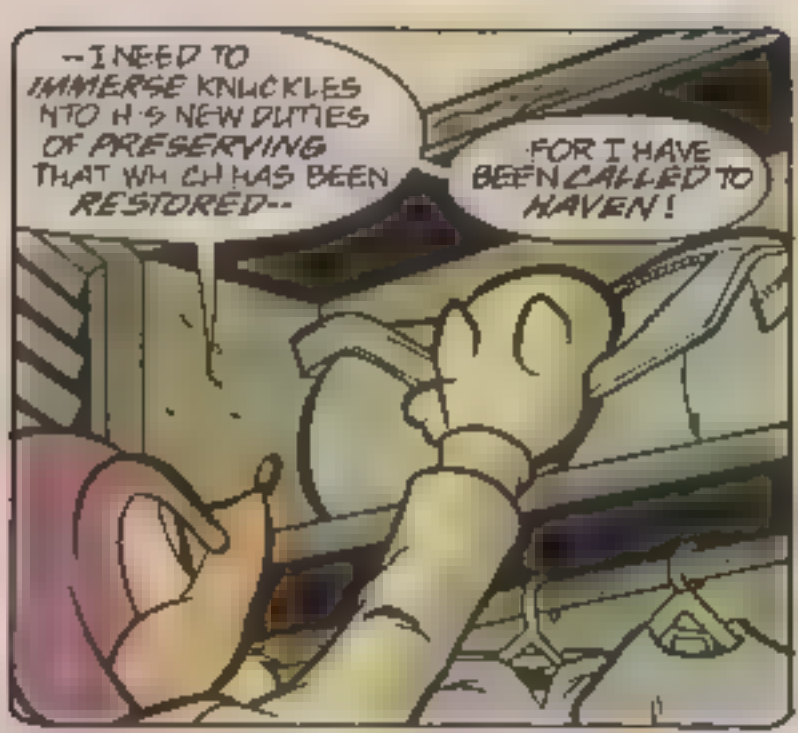
IT'S TIME I BEGIN HIS TRAINING!

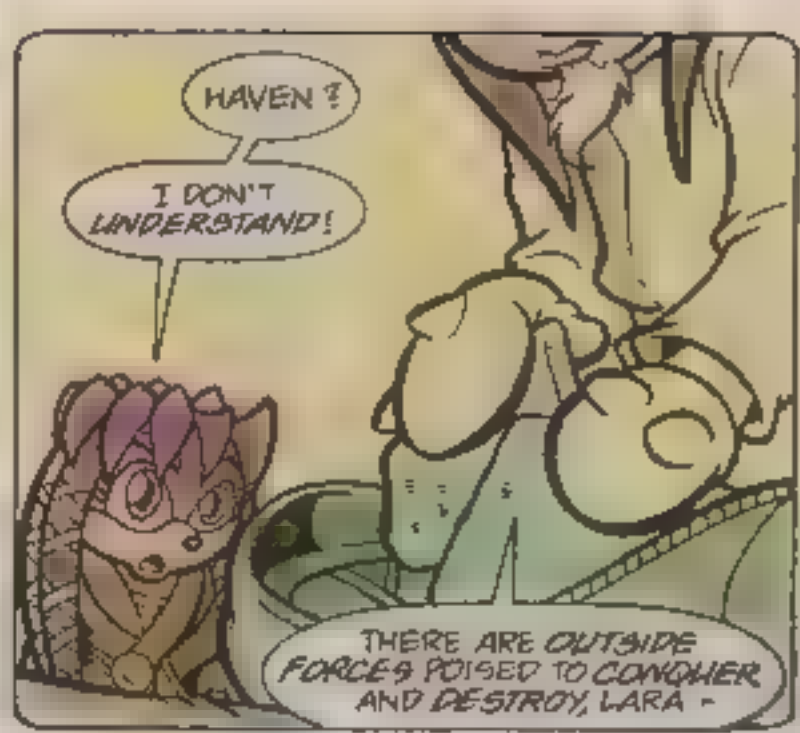
WHATEVER FOR? EVERYTHING KNUCKLES KNOWS AND LOVES IS HERE!

FROM WHAT I RECALL OF OUR HISTORY, THE FLOATING ISLAND IS NOTHING MORE THAN A DESOLATE WASTELAND!

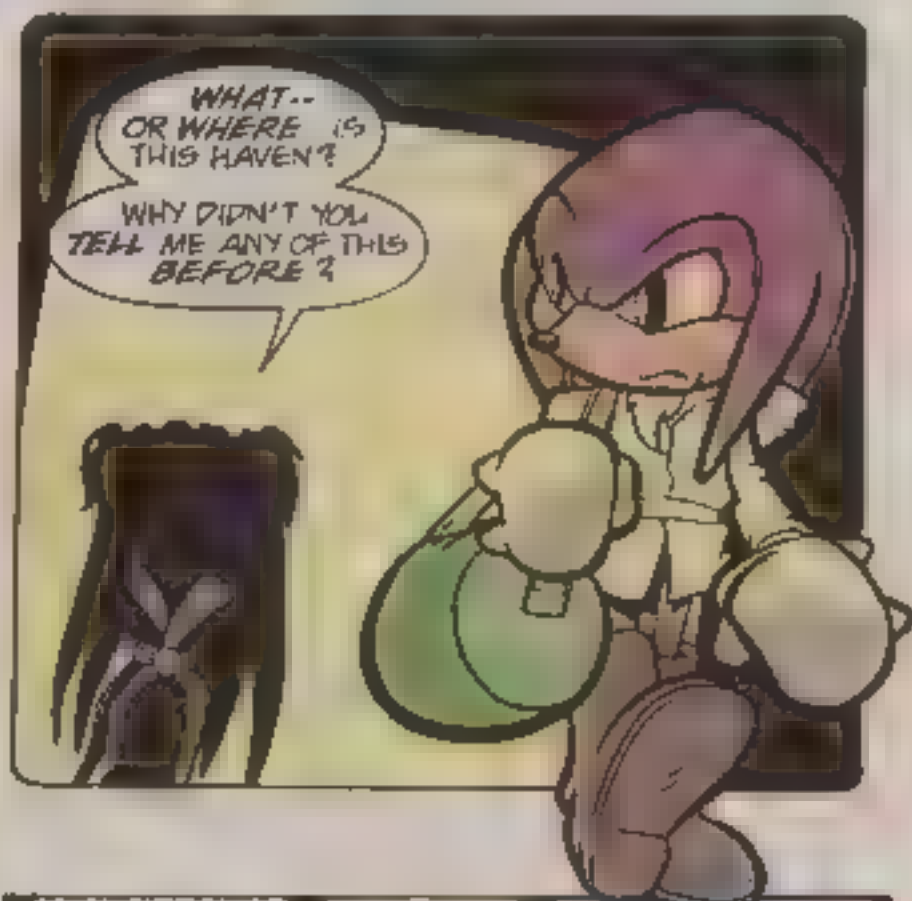
NOT ANY LONGER. MY FOREFATHERS HAVE WORKED LONG AND HARD TO RECLAIM THE LAND!

AND NOW--

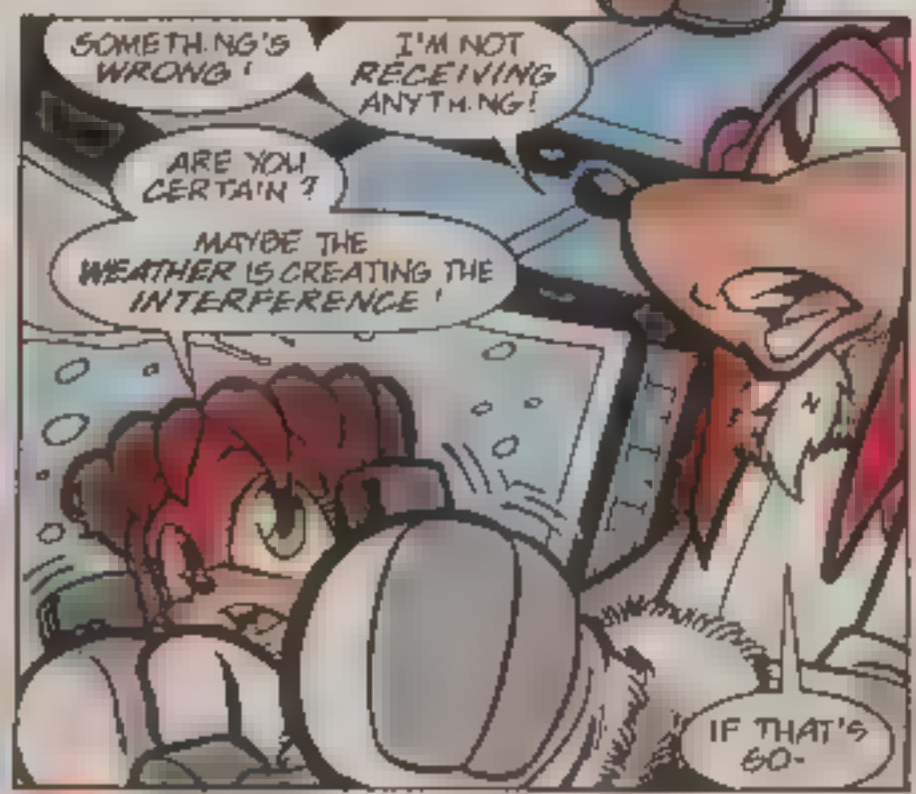

--I NEED TO IMMERSE KNUCKLES INTO HIS NEW DUTIES OF PRESERVING THAT WHICH HAS BEEN RESTORED--
FOR I HAVE BEEN CALLED TO HAVEN!

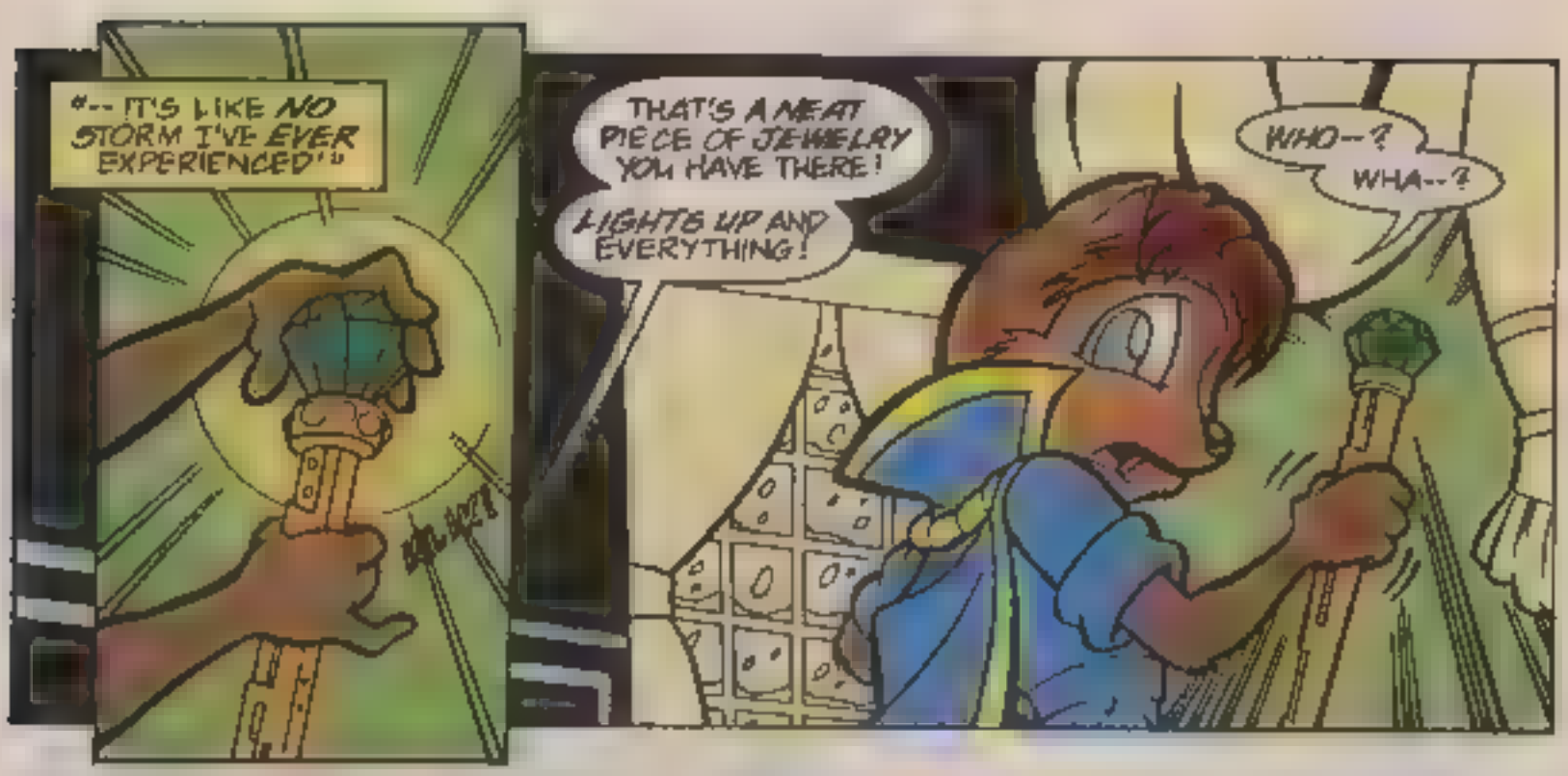

HAVEN?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND!
THERE ARE OUTSIDE FORCES POISED TO CONQUER AND DESTROY, LARA -

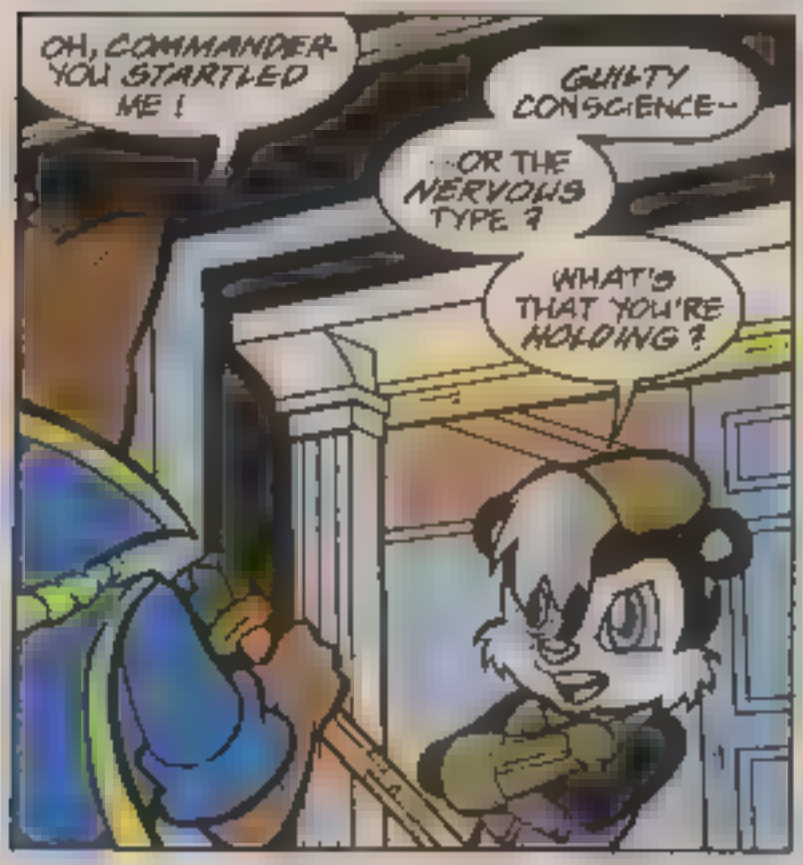
--AND I'M NEEDED TO HELP SECURE THE SAFETY OF ECHIDNAS EVERYWHERE!
I CAN'T DO MY PART UNTIL I'VE MADE CERTAIN OUR SON CAN DO HIS!

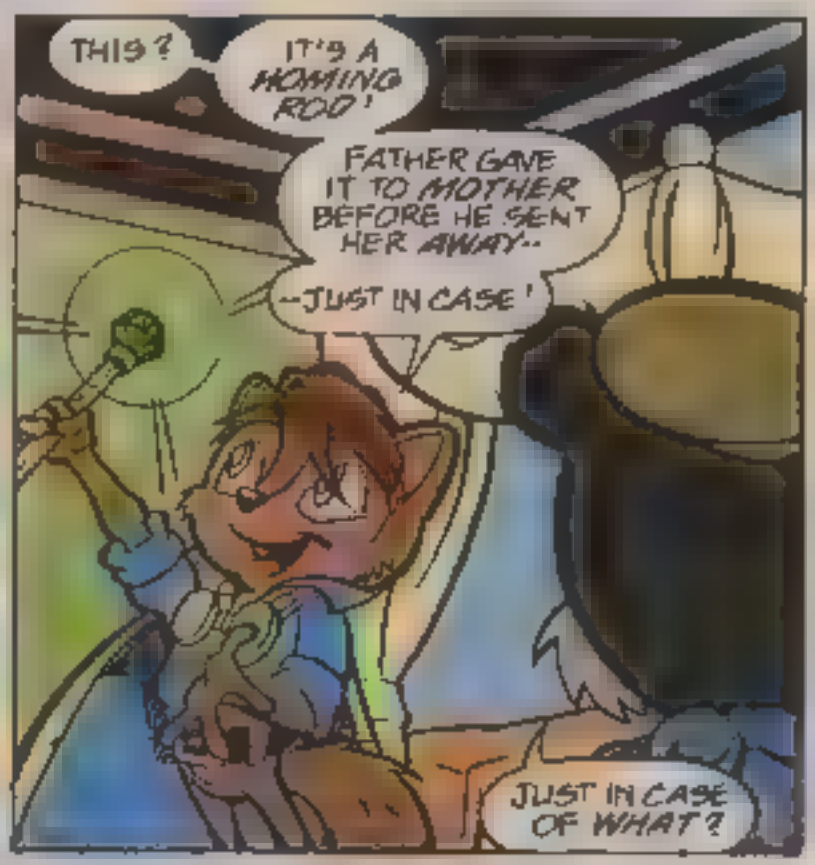

WHAT-- OR WHERE IS THIS HAVEN?
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME ANY OF THIS BEFORE?

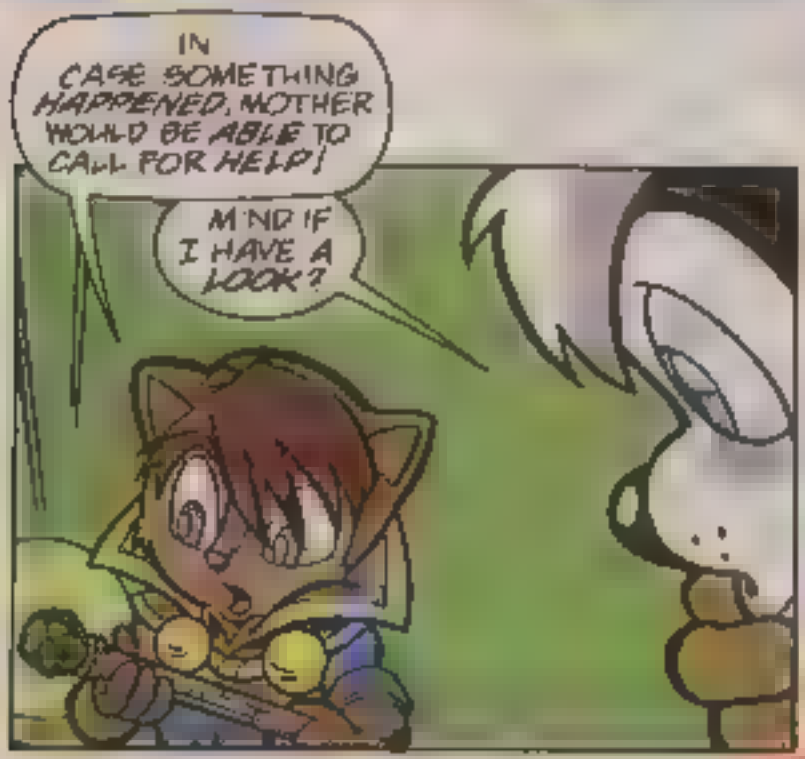
WE'RE JUST ABOUT AT THE EDGE OF THE FORBIDDEN ZONE!
I SHOULD BE LOCKING ONTO THE GUIDING BEACON IN THE NEXT FEW SECONDS!

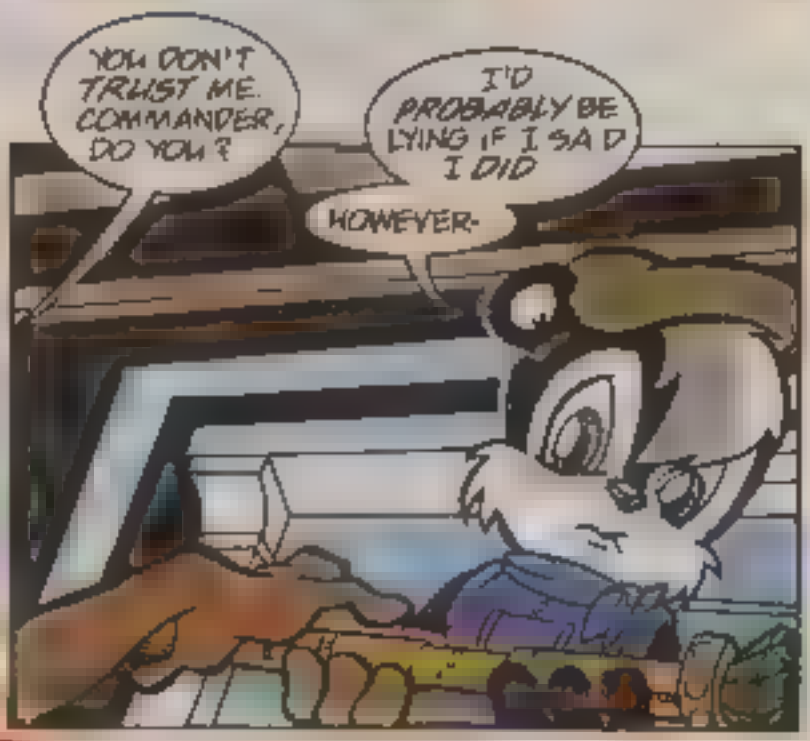

SOMETHING'S WRONG!
I'M NOT RECEIVING ANYTHING!
ARE YOU CERTAIN?
MAYBE THE WEATHER IS CREATING THE INTERFERENCE!
IF THAT'S SO-


"-- IT'S LIKE NO STORM I'VE EVER EXPERIENCED!"
THAT'S A NEAT PIECE OF JEWELRY YOU HAVE THERE!
LIGHTS UP AND EVERYTHING!
WHO--?
WHA--?


OH, COMMANDER YOU STARTLED ME!
GUILTY CONSCIENCE--
--OR THE NERVOUS TYPE?
WHAT'S THAT YOU'RE HOLDING?


THIS?
IT'S A HOMING ROD!
FATHER GAVE IT TO MOTHER BEFORE HE SENT HER AWAY--
--JUST IN CASE!
JUST IN CASE OF WHAT?


IN CASE SOMETHING HAPPENED, MOTHER WOULD BE ABLE TO CALL FOR HELP!
MIND IF I HAVE A LOOK?


YOU DON'T TRUST ME, COMMANDER, DO YOU?
I'D PROBABLY BE LYING IF I SAID I DID
HOWEVER-

--I'VE SEEN ENOUGH ROYAL OBJECTS TO KNOW THIS IS THE REAL DEAL!

WHERE'D YOU GET IT?

[redacted] GAVE IT TO ME!

AS TO WHERE HE GOT IT FROM--

--YOUR GUESS [redacted] GOOD AS MINE!

SAY! THAT SMELLS LIKE MRS. SOMMERSBY'S ARGYLEAN TEA! I'LL BET THE COLONEL IS UP AS WELL!

AND I'D WAGER HE'D HAVE AN EDUCATED GUESS OR TWO!

I TOLD YOU I THOUGHT I HEARD VOICES, FATHER!

COME ON IN BOYS--

--AND PULL UP A SEAT!

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL HOSPITALITY.

--A PLACE TO RELAX WHILE ENJOYING SOME EXCELLENT HOME COOKING!

WHAT'S THAT YOU HAVE THERE, COMMANDER?

THIS PIECE OF METAL, COLONEL?

YOU TELL ME!

BY THE STARS!

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YOU KNOW, DON'T YOU, COLONEL!

KING ACORN'S MEMORY MAY BE A BIT SPOTTY THESE DAYS--

--BUT YOU WERE AMONG THE QUEEN'S GUARDSMEN ON THAT LOST MISSION!

YES! I THOUGHT I COULD FINALLY BURY THE PAST -

--UNTIL YOU CAME!

AT FIRST, I THOUGHT YOU WERE A GHOST--

--UNTIL I REMEMBERED SEEING YOUR FATHER SAYING GOODBYE TO YOU AS WE READIED THE ESCAPE CRAFT FOR QUEEN ALICIA!

"I WAS YOUR FATHER'S RIGHT-HAND MAN BACK THEN, SO IT WAS ONLY NATURAL HE TURNED TO ME WITH A SPECIAL MATTER NEEDING TENDING TO...

COLONEL, WE NEED A POD PREPARED TO TRANSPORT PRINCE ELIAS WITH US!

WHAT ABOUT THE PRINCESS, COMMANDER?

SHE'S WITH ROSIE AT KNOTHOLE!

EVEN THOUGH THE EXISTENCE OF THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS IS A CLASSIFIED WARTIME STATE SECRET, THIS CRAFT IS ALREADY A BIG ENOUGH TARGET WITH THE QUEEN AND PRINCE ABOARD!

SHOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN--

--I DON'T WANT THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF ACORN LAID AT MY TOMBSTONE!

"DESPITE THE DESPERATE SITUATION WE MANAGED TO BE AIRBORNE LESS THAN THIRTY MINUTES AFTER KING ACORN GAVE THE ORDER...." *

HOLD ON TIGHT, EVERYONE!

NEXT STOP-

* TO SEE THE ORDER GIVEN, CHECK OUT SONIC #64 "THE MISSION" --JFG

-THE FLOATING ISLAND!

IT'LL BE MORE COMFORTABLE ONCE WE REACH THE ROYAL COMPOUND, QUEEN ALICIA!

I'M FINE, COMMANDER-- REALLY, I AM!

COMFORT IS THE LAST THING ON MY MIND!

"WE HAVE JUST ABOUT MADE IT TO OUR DESTINATION WITHOUT INCIDENT, WHEN..

ETA* SEVEN MINUTES TO TOUCHDOWN

*ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL- CAPTAIN GABRIE

WHAT THE--?!!

WE'RE HIT!!!

SECURE THE QUEEN AND THE PRINCE!!

ELIAS!! I MUST GET TO ELIAS!

WE'RE TAKING CARE OF HIM, YOUR MAJESTY!

YOUR SAFETY IS A PRIMARY CONCERN AS WELL!

"AFTER SECURING THE YOUNG PRINCE, I SCRAMBLED TO THE COCKPIT...

WHAT'S GOING ON, COMMANDER?!

OVERLANDER ATTACK!

THEY WERE USING THE ISLAND AS COVER!

BUT HOW--?

"BEFORE ANYMORE COULD BE SAID, THE ATTACKERS LAID A DIRECT HIT TO THE SHIP'S ENGINES—

ZZZAAT!

"... CAUSING US TO LAND SOMEWHERE IN THE DENSE FOREST ON THE ISLAND

KRYAAAASH!!!

"WHEN I CAME TO, I FOUND WRECKAGE SCATTERED EVERYWHERE AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE..."

COMMANDER!

QUEEN ALICIA!

CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?!!

I NEVER FOUND EVEN A TRACE OF ANYONE AFTER THAT!

IT WASN'T UNTIL YEARS LATER I DISCOVERED ELIAS WANDERING OUTSIDE THE COMPOUND!

"NATURALLY, I WAS SUSPICIOUS.

HOW DO I KNOW YOU'RE WHO YOU CLAIM YOU ARE?

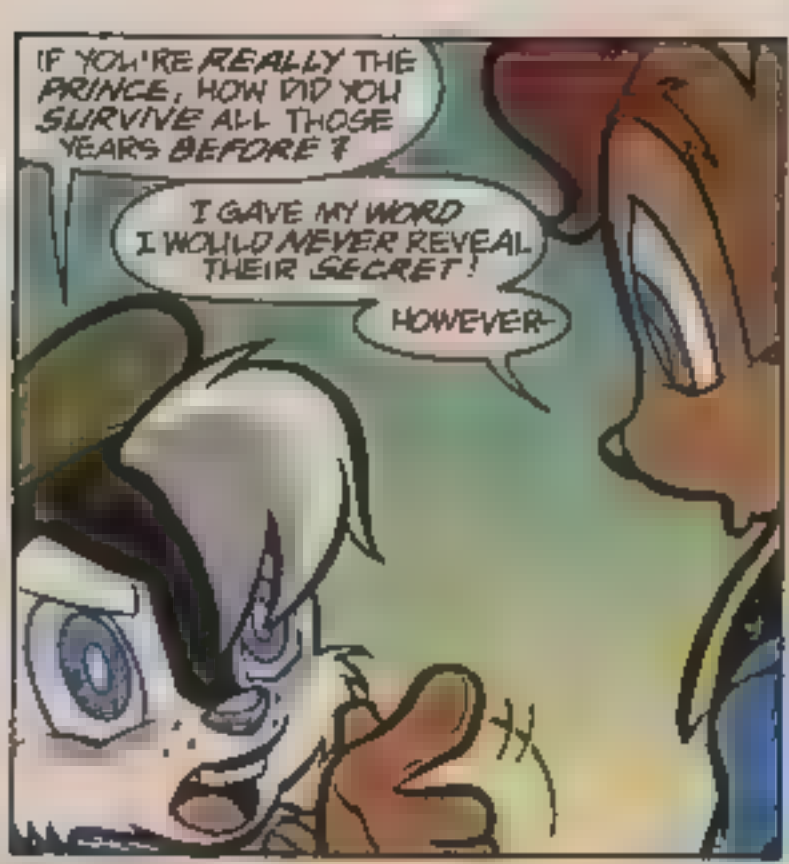
OTHER THAN MY FAMILY, ONLY THE QUEEN'S GUARDSMEN WOULD RECOGNIZE THE MARK I BEAR

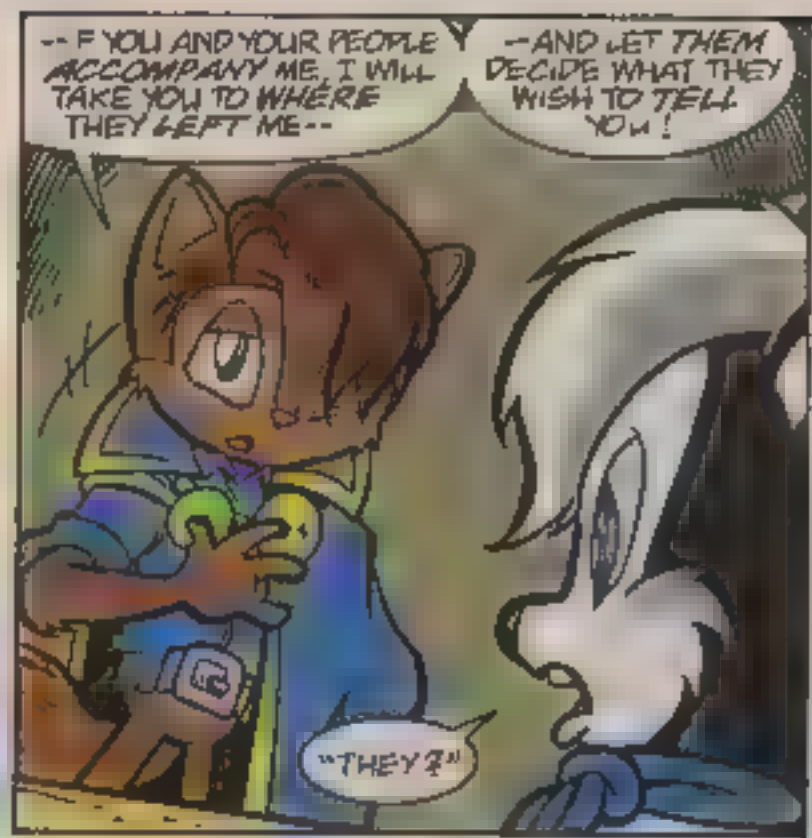
THAT WAS THE CLINCHER, EH?

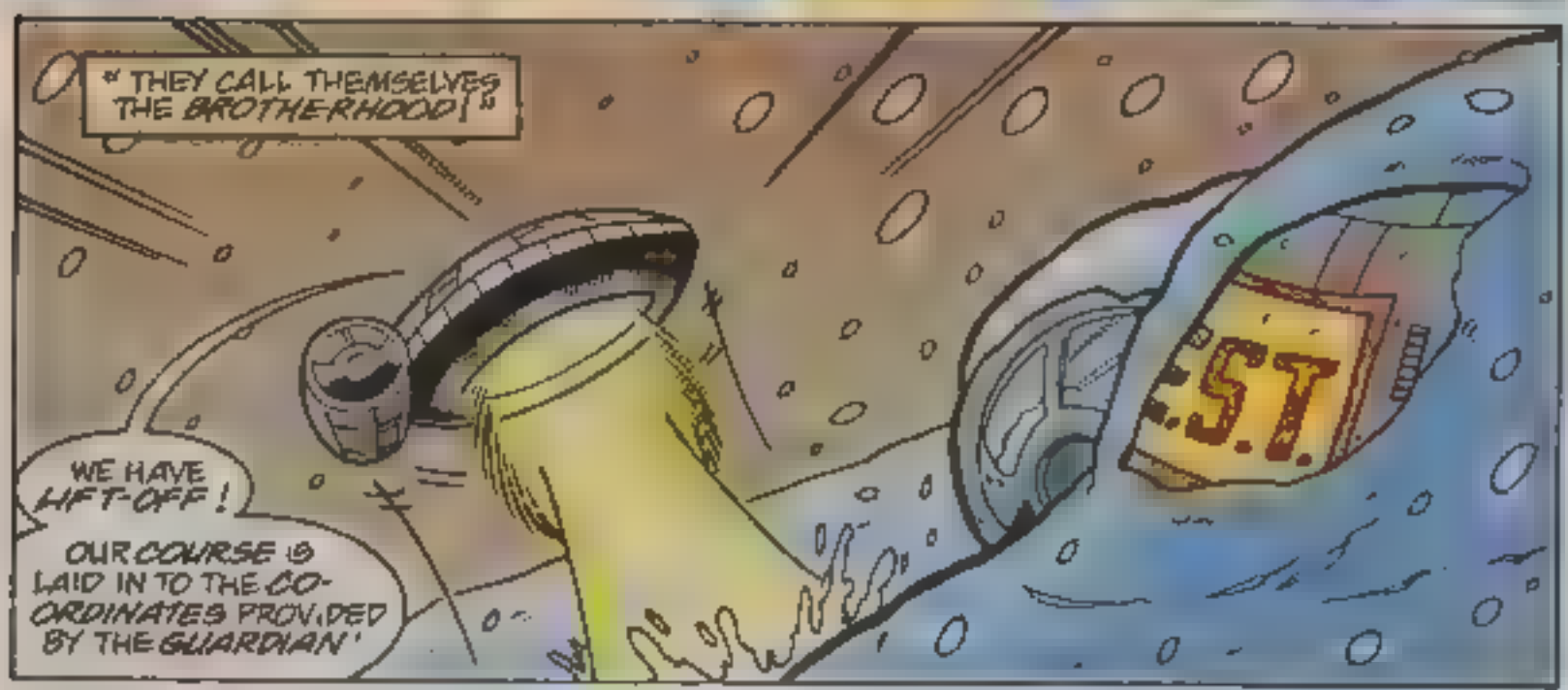
BEYOND QUESTION. I KNEW THEN IT WAS ELIAS!

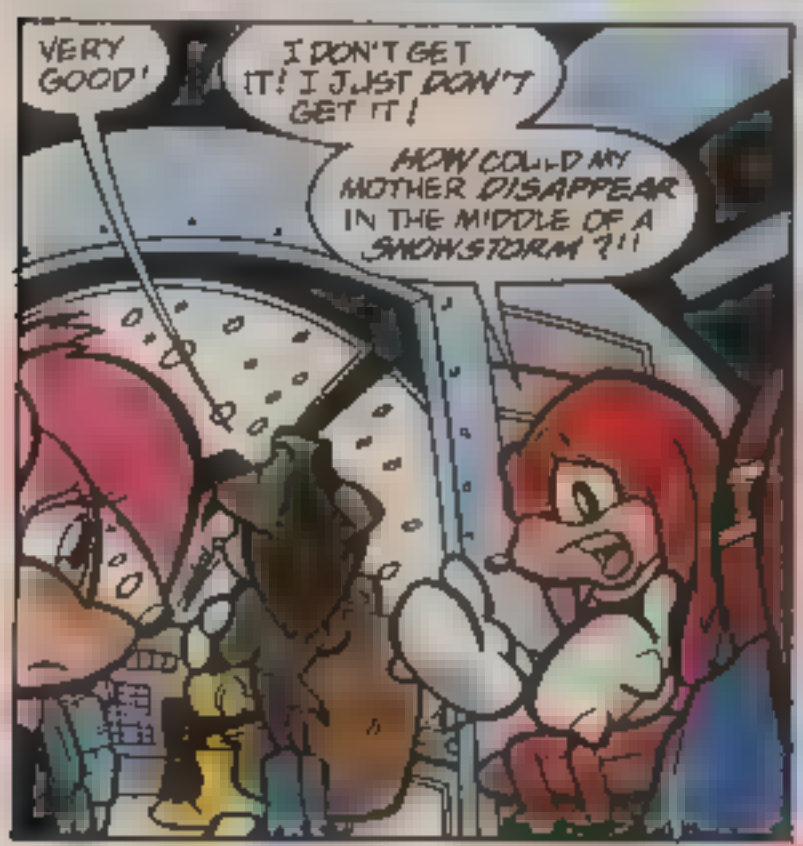
I JUST DIDN'T KNOW HOW!

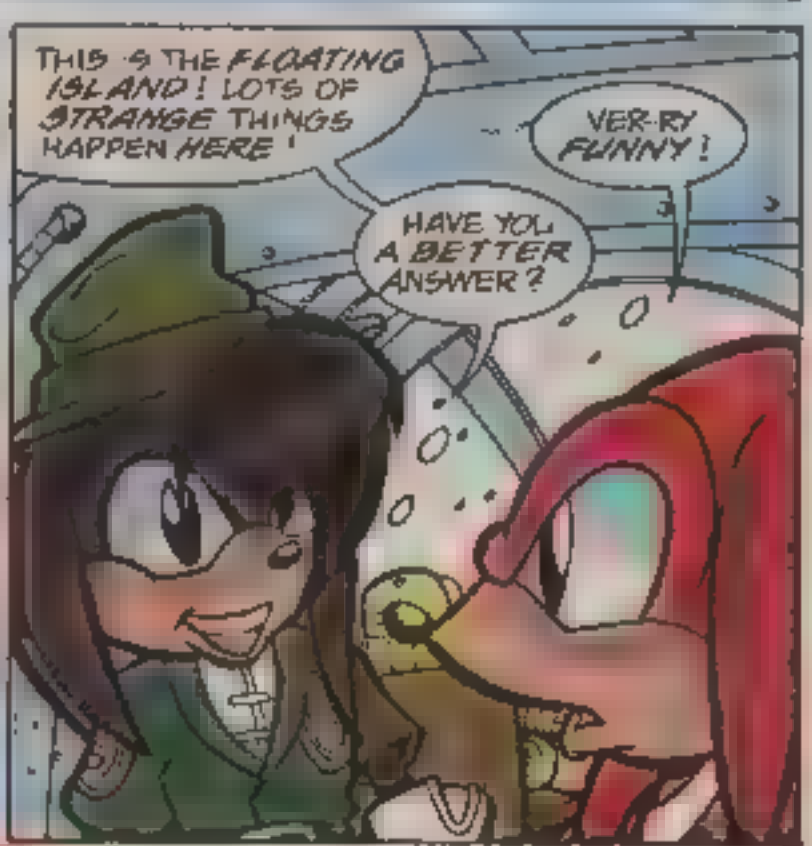
WHAT ABOUT YOU?

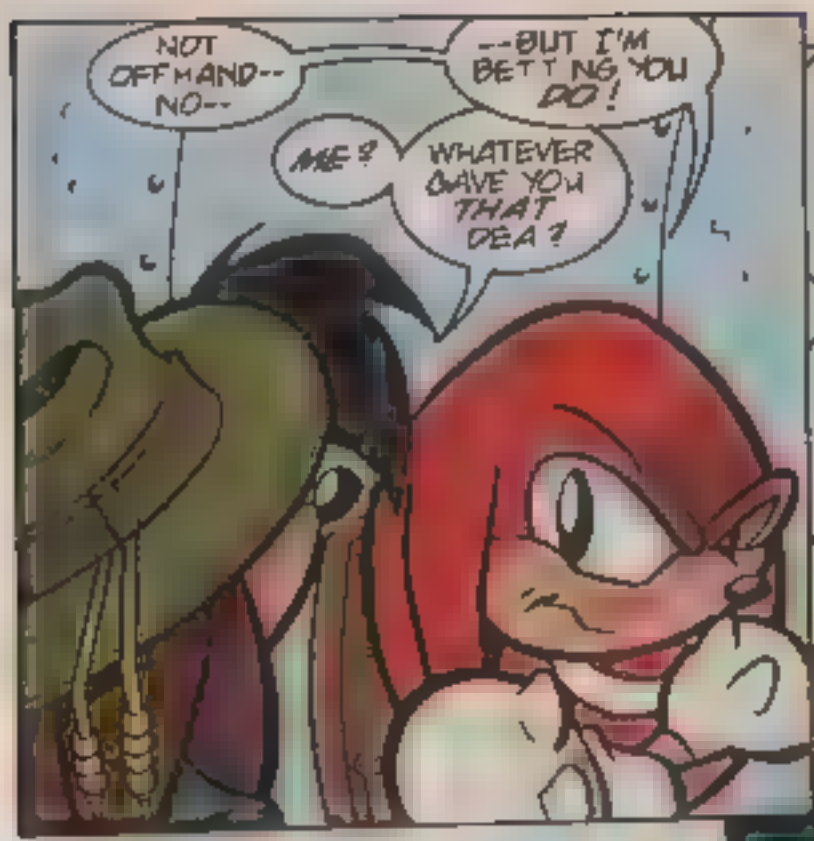

IF YOU'RE REALLY THE PRINCE, HOW DID YOU SURVIVE ALL THOSE YEARS BEFORE ?
I GAVE MY WORD I WOULD NEVER REVEAL THEIR SECRET !
HOWEVER-


-- F YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE ACCOMPANY ME, I WILL TAKE YOU TO WHERE THEY LEFT ME--
--AND LET THEM DECIDE WHAT THEY WISH TO TELL YOU !
"THEY ?"

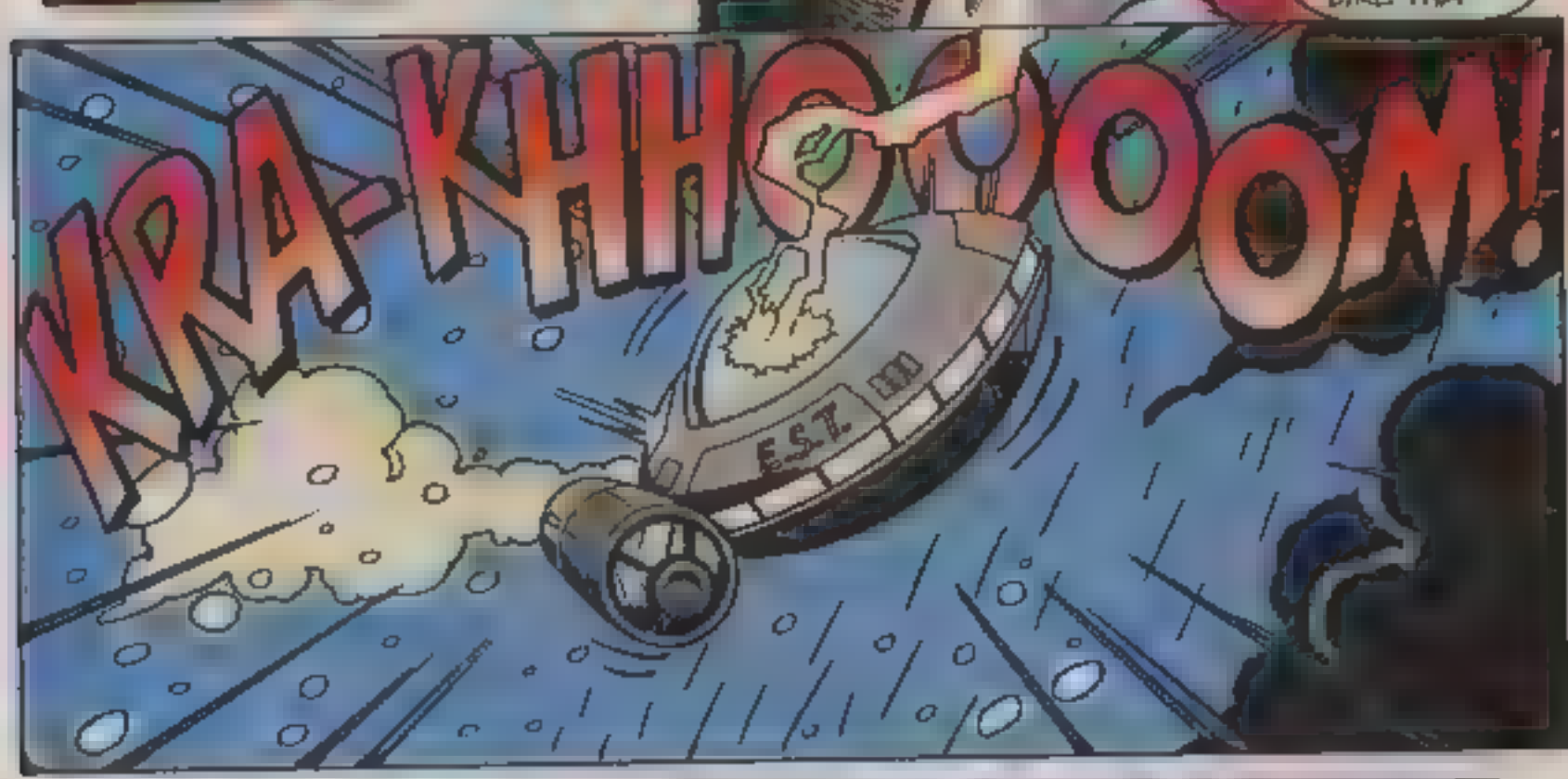

" THEY CALL THEMSELVES THE BROTHERHOOD !"
WE HAVE LIFT-OFF !
OUR COURSE IS LAID IN TO THE CO-ORDINATES PROVIDED BY THE GUARDIAN !

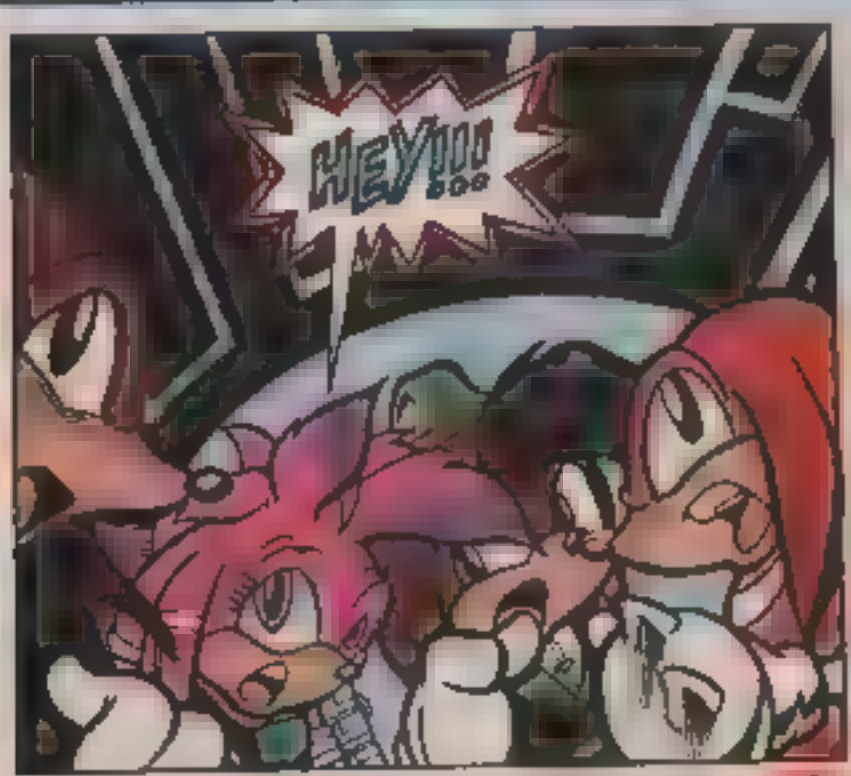

VERY GOOD !
I DON'T GET IT ! I JUST DON'T GET IT !
HOW COULD MY MOTHER DISAPPEAR IN THE MIDDLE OF A SNOWSTORM ?!!

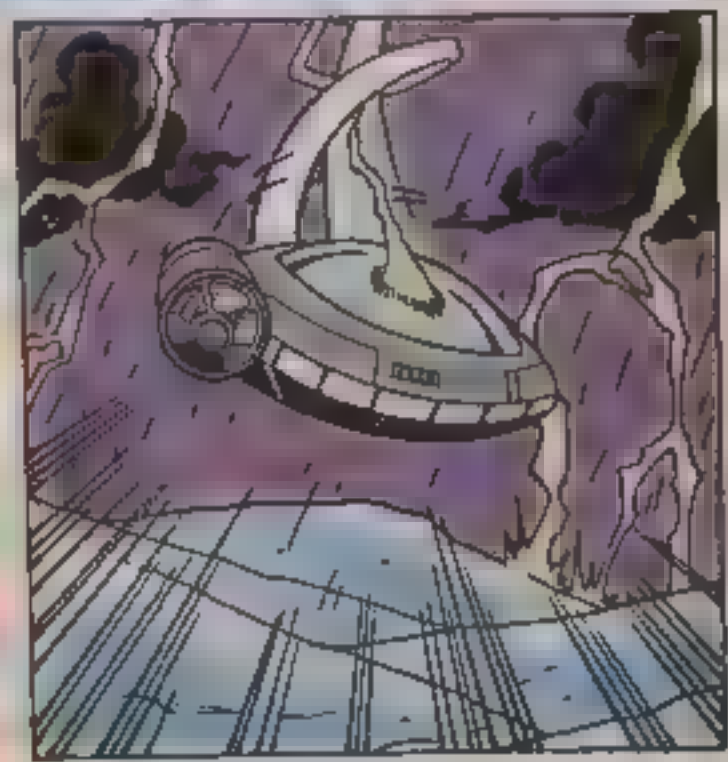

THIS IS THE FLOATING ISLAND ! LOTS OF STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN HERE !
VER-RY FUNNY !
HAVE YOU A BETTER ANSWER ?


NOT OFF HAND-- NO--
--BUT I'M BETTING YOU DO!
ME?
WHATEVER GAVE YOU THAT IDEA?

I DUNNO!
MAYBE IT'S THE FEELING YOU'RE WITHHOLDING SOMETHING EVERY TIME I TALK TO YOU!
LIKE KNOWING MY MOTHER TOOK OFF FOR THE FORBIDDEN ZONE, FOR INSTANCE!
SMALL THINGS LIKE THA--


KRA-KHHOOOM!
E.S.Z.


HEY!!!



MEANWHILE ..

THIS WEATHER IS GETTING WILDER BY THE MINUTE!

WE'RE GOING FROM A SNOW BLIZZARD TO A TORRENTIAL RAINFALL!

WHAT NEXT?

I SEE YOU STILL HAVEN'T STUDIED THE TOMES!

YEARS AGO, AS A CHILD!

MY PARENTS MADE ME!

FATHER STILL GETS ON MY CASE ABOUT IT EVERY NOW AND THEN!

WHY?

SCRIPTURE HAS IT THAT A CLEANSING PROCESS OCCURS IN NATURE EVERY SO OFTEN!

THE TOMES REFER TO IT AS A DAY OF FURY!

AND YOU BELIEVE WHATEVER'S HAPPENING IS PROPHECY COME TRUE!

YES, I DO!

YOUR LACK OF FAITH IS ONE OF MANY REASONS I CAME OUT HERE LOOKING FOR YOU!

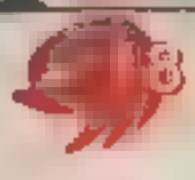
I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO HEAR THE REST!

HOLD ON!

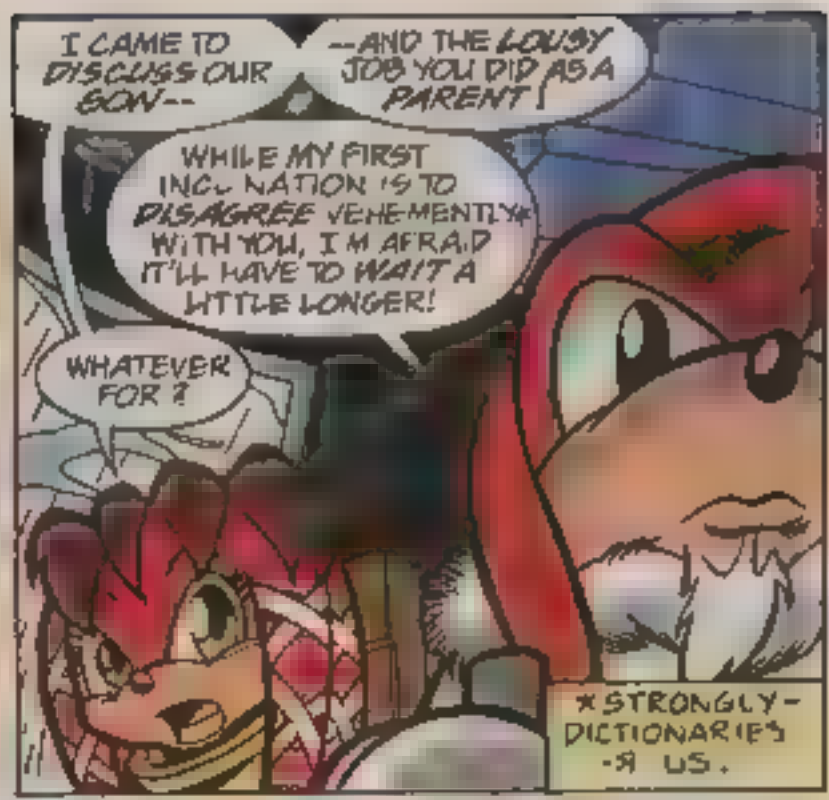
I'M PICKING UP A SIGNAL ON THE SCANNER!

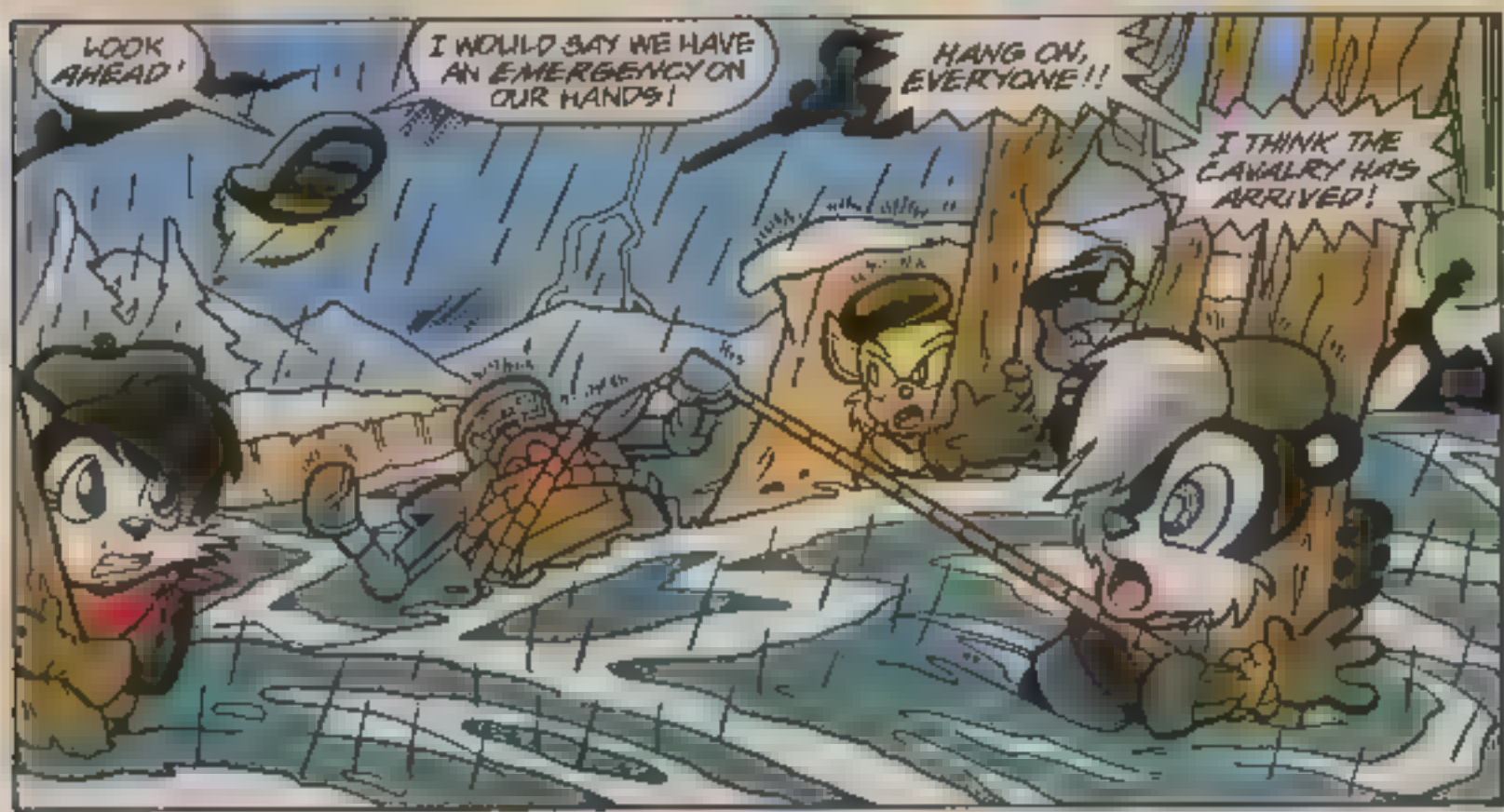
MOST UNUSUAL! WE'D BETTER CHECK THIS OUT!

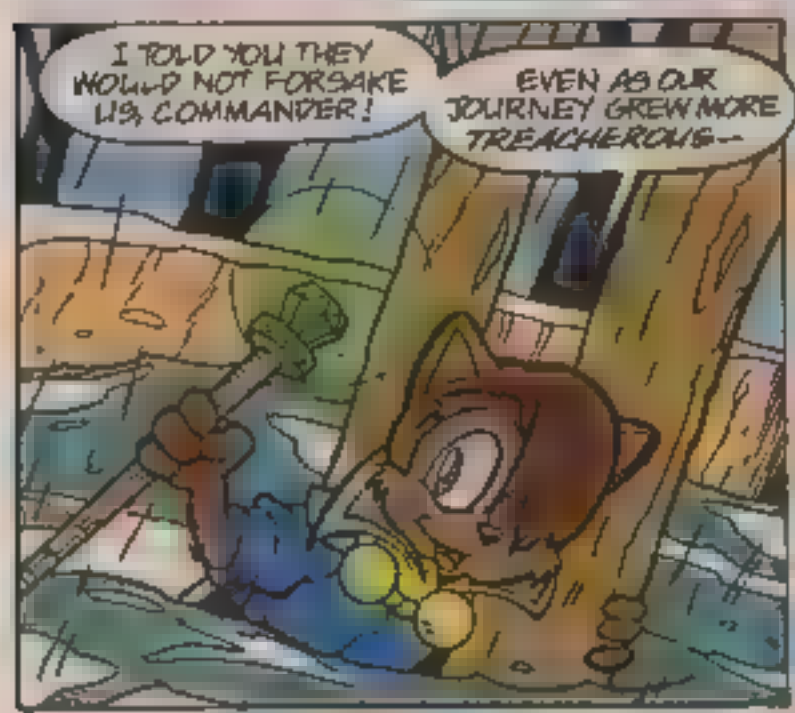
LOCKE--

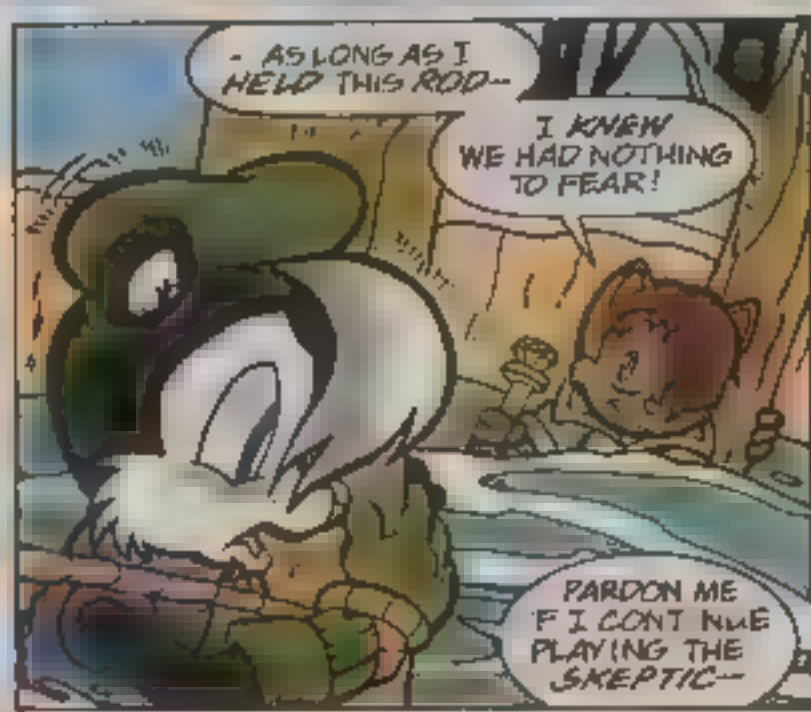


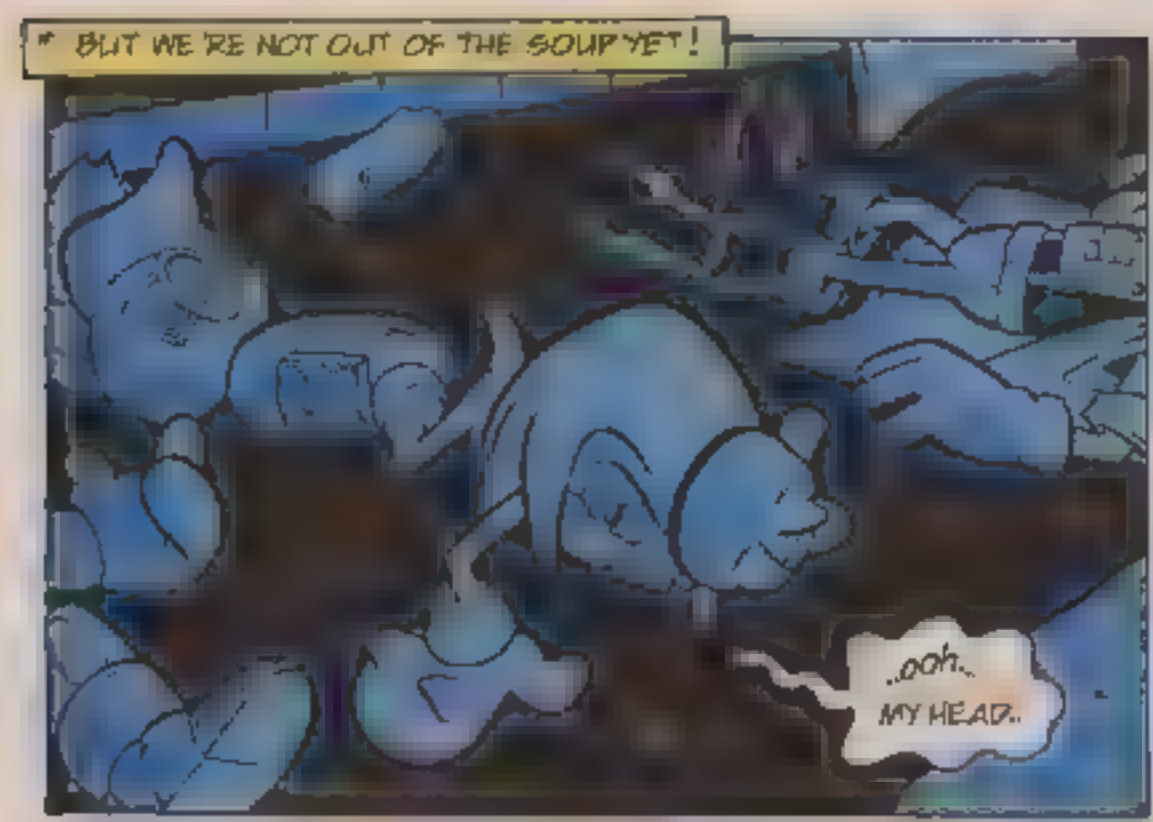
--I DID NOT COME ALL THIS WAY TO GO ADVENTURING WITH YOU!
THEN WHY DID YOU COME?


I CAME TO DISCUSS OUR SON--
--AND THE LOUSY JOB YOU DID AS A PARENT!
WHILE MY FIRST INCLINATION IS TO DISAGREE VEHEMENTLY* WITH YOU, I'M AFRAID IT'LL HAVE TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER!
WHATEVER FOR?
*STRONGLY- DICTIONARIES -R US.

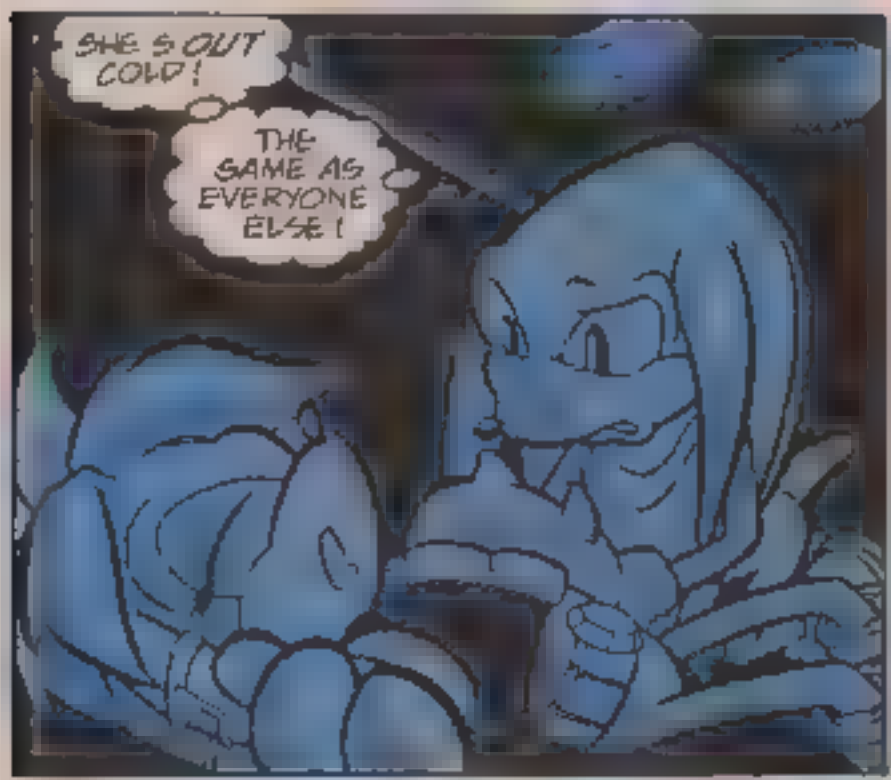

LOOK AHEAD!
I WOULD SAY WE HAVE AN EMERGENCY ON OUR HANDS!
HANG ON, EVERYONE!!
I THINK THE CAVALRY HAS ARRIVED!


I TOLD YOU THEY WOULD NOT FORSAKE US, COMMANDER!
EVEN AS OUR JOURNEY GREW MORE TREACHEROUS--

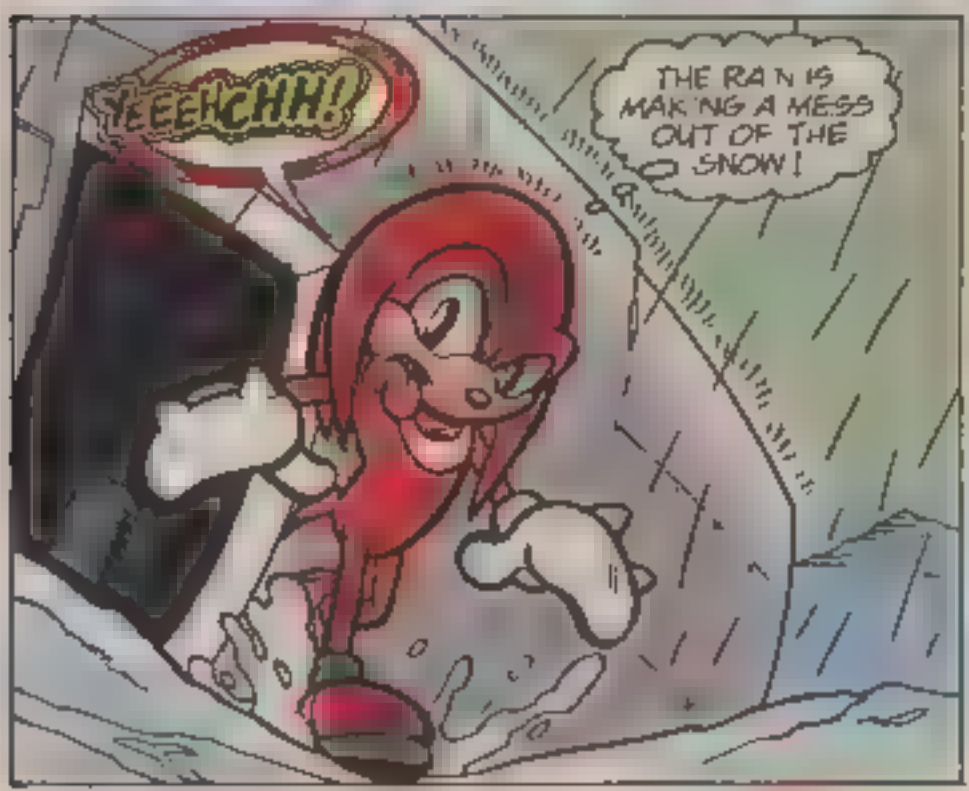

- AS LONG AS I HELD THIS ROD--
I KNEW WE HAD NOTHING TO FEAR!
PARDON ME IF I CONTINUE PLAYING THE SKEPTIC--


BUT WE'RE NOT OUT OF THE SOUP YET!
..ooh.. MY HEAD..

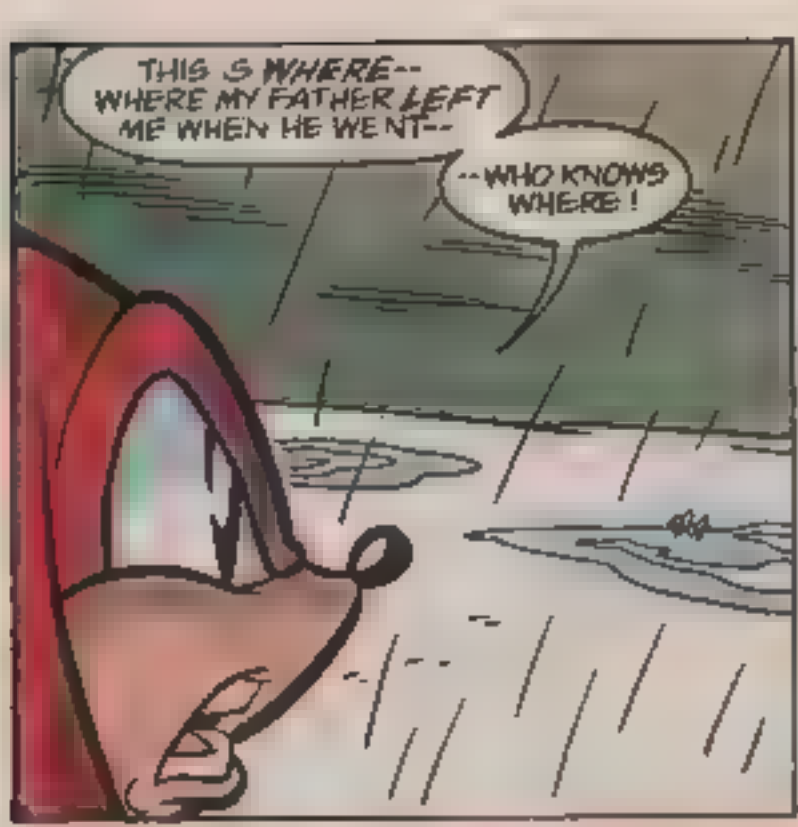
JULIE-SU?

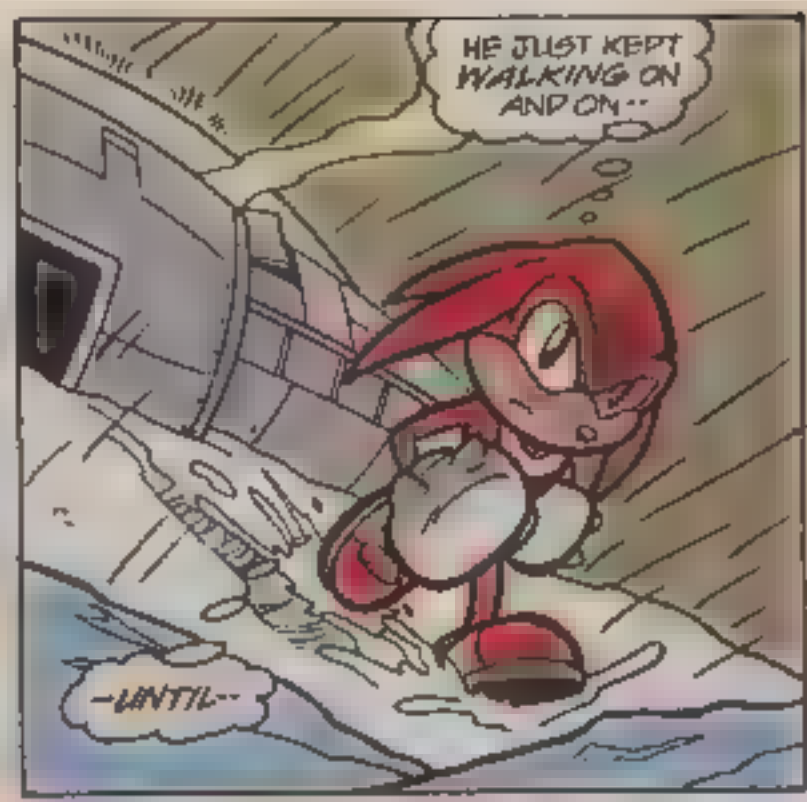

SHE'S OUT COLD!
THE SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE!

MIGHT AS WELL GO OUTSIDE AND SEE HOW BAD THE DAMAGE IS!

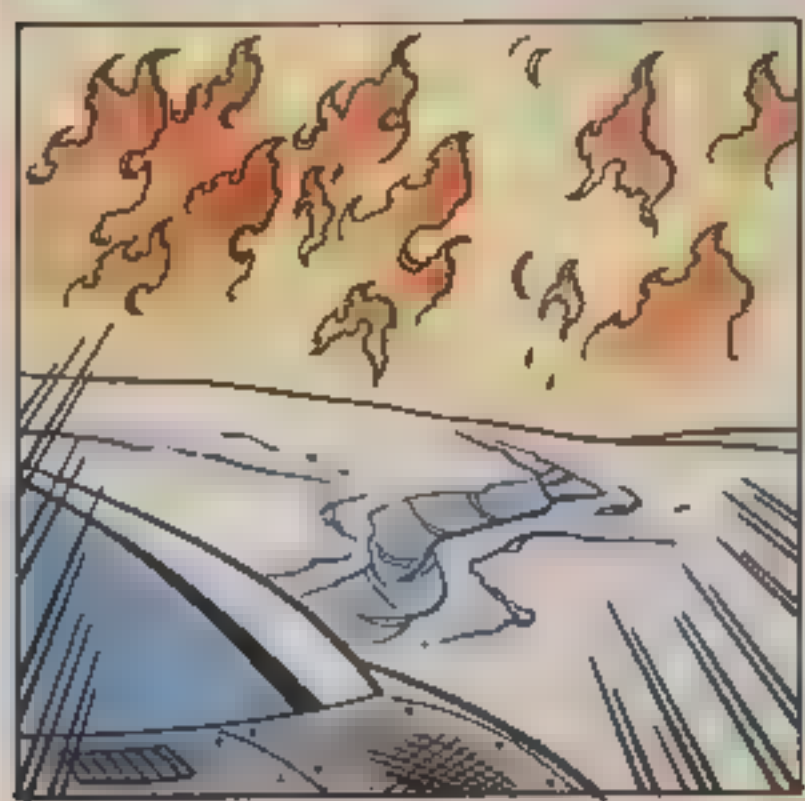

YEEEHCHH!
THE RAIN IS MAKING A MESS OUT OF THE SNOW!

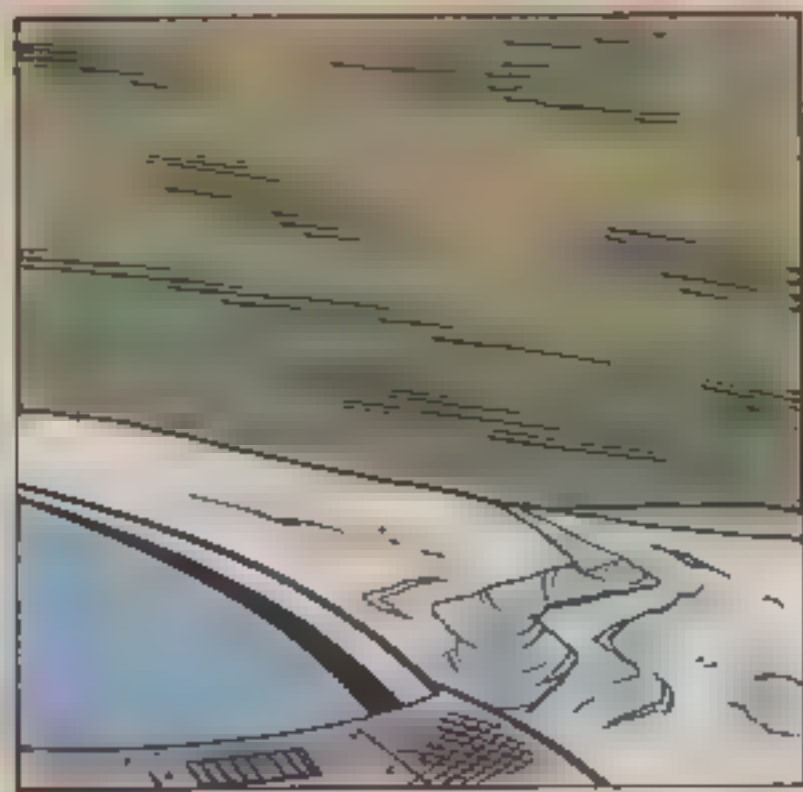
WAITAMINUTE!!!
I KNOW WHERE WE ARE-!

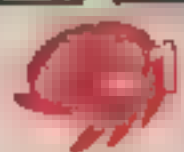

THIS IS WHERE-- WHERE MY FATHER LEFT ME WHEN HE WENT--
--WHO KNOWS WHERE!

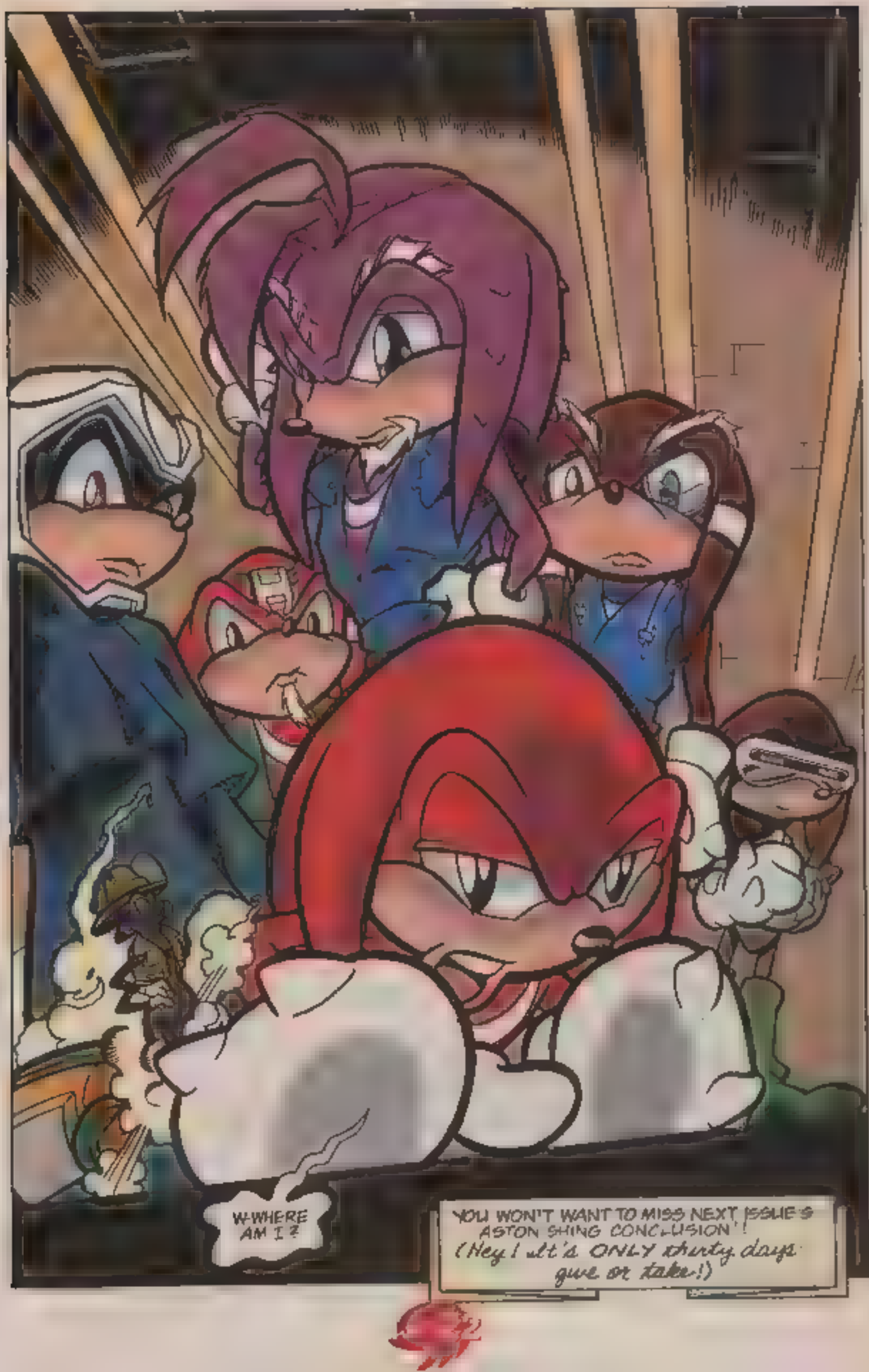

HE JUST KEPT WALKING ON AND ON--
--UNTIL--

HOO BOY!

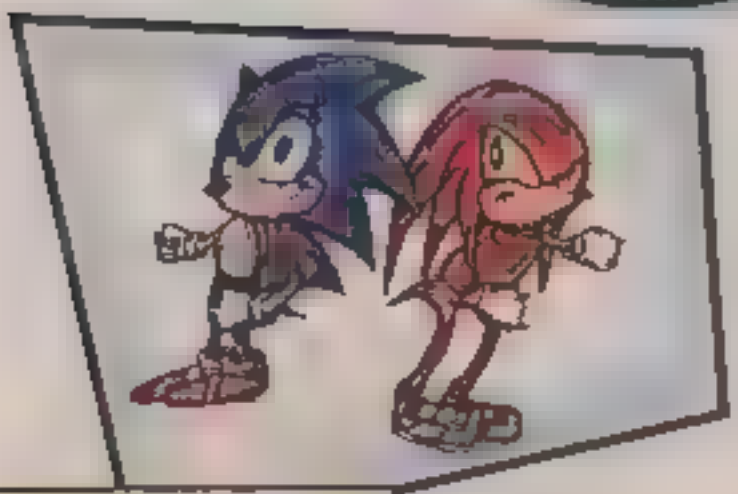




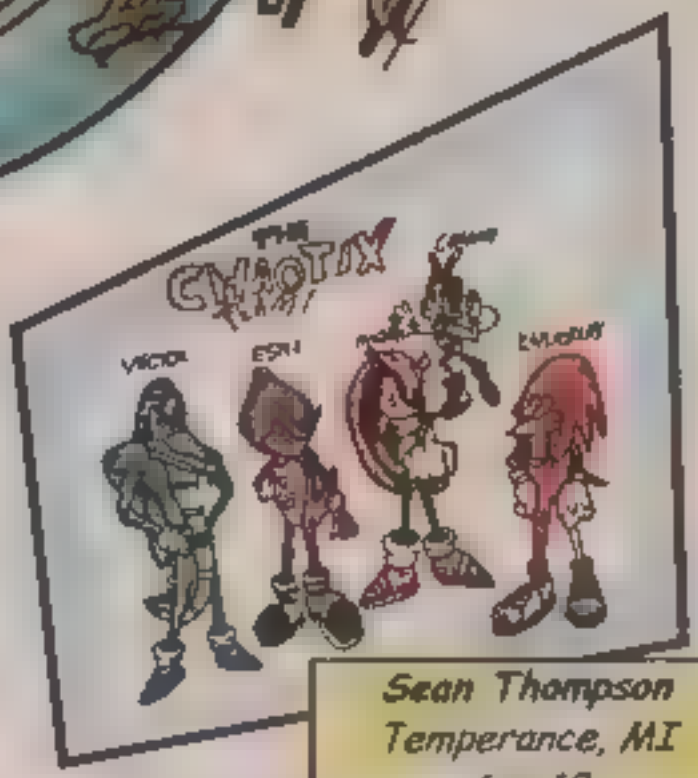



W-WHERE AM I?
YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS NEXT ISSUE'S ASTON SHING CONCLUSION!
(Hey! It's ONLY thirty days give or take!)

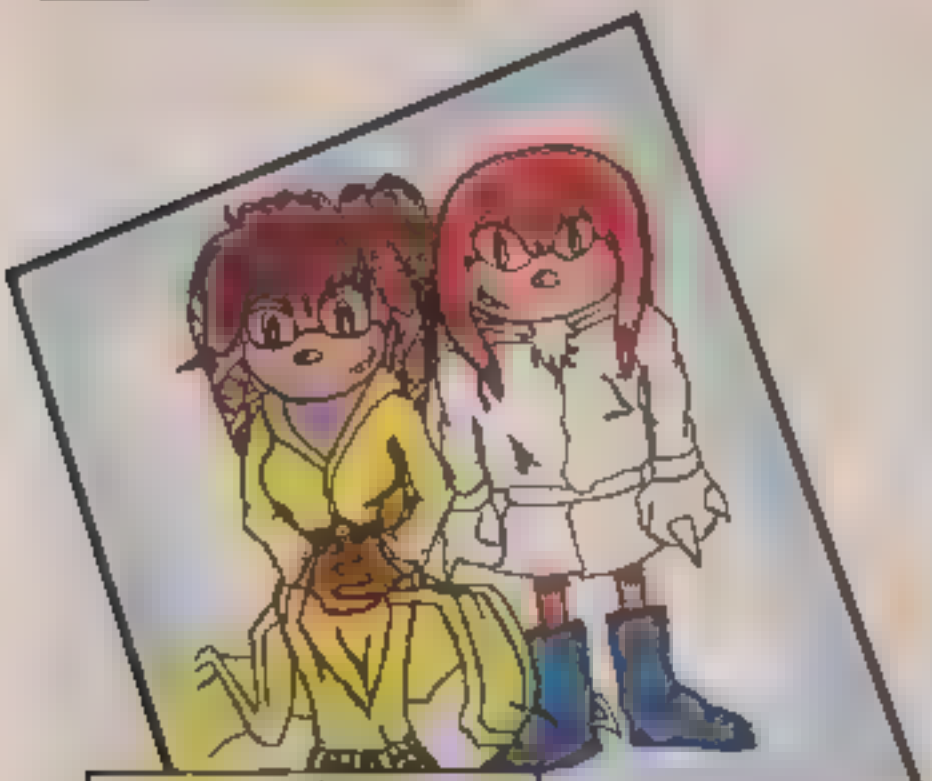
Knuckles Fan Art



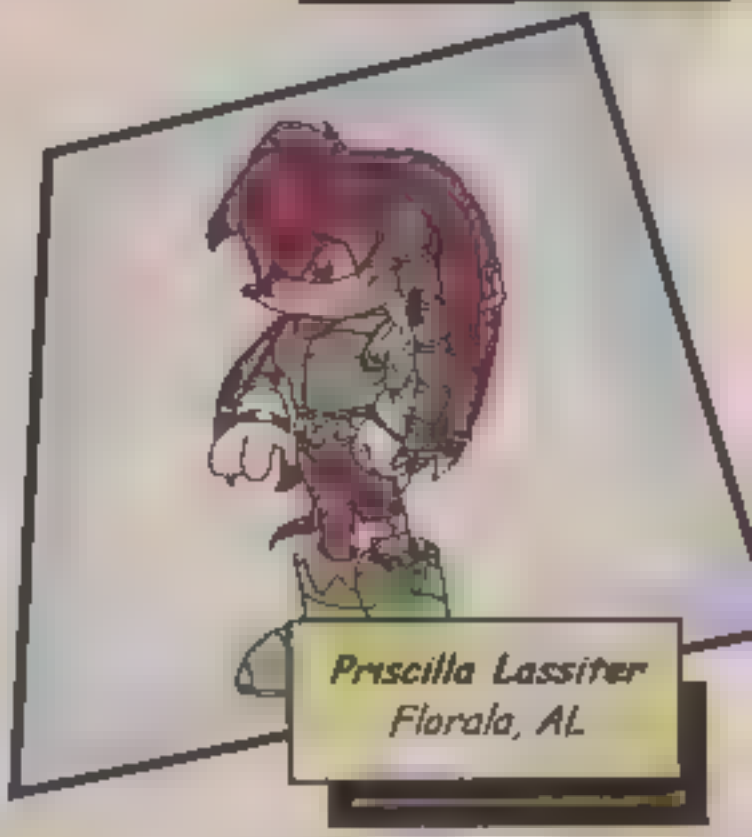
Rashad Farrar
Brockton, MA
Age 8



Sean Thompson
Temperance, MI
Age 10



Preston William Simms
Fredericksburg, VA
Age 12



Priscilla Lassiter
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CATCH YOU ON THE FLIP SIDE

Justin "Freddy" Gabrie

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